



SOF'S ADVENTURE DESTINATIONS

JULY 1991

48493

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

The Journal of Professional Soldiers

**DESERT
STORM:**

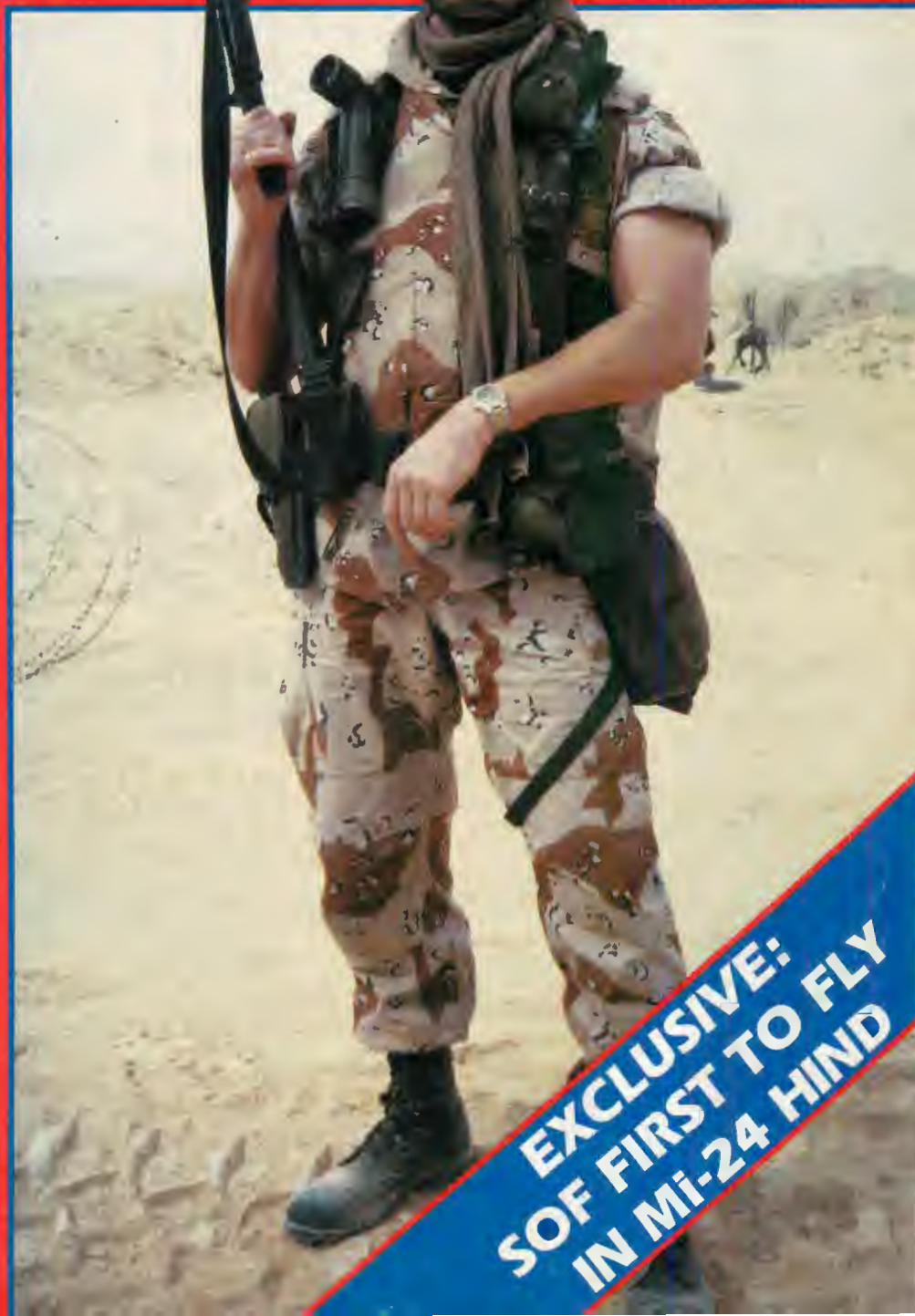
**BRIT SAS
IN IRAQ**

**DESERT
BLADES**

**SMOKE
AND MIRRORS**

**KEYSTONE
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**SEALS'
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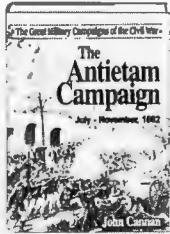
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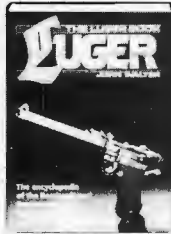
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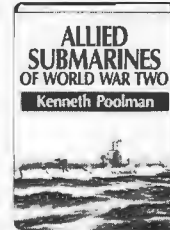
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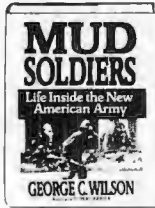
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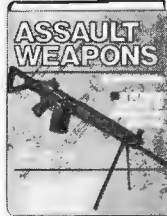
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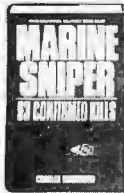
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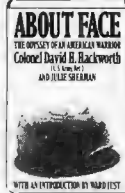
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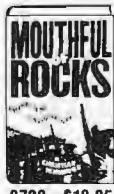
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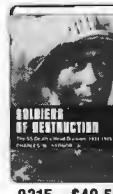
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SOF 7/91

FEATURES



Call of the Wild —Page 48

Photo: Jack Wheeler

CALL OF

THE WILD Neil Livingstone
Swim the Hellespont, climb the Matterhorn, cross the Sahara from west to east. There's a lot of adventure out there — this piece tells you how to find it. Join adventurer Jack Wheeler, a real-life "Indiana Jones," on some of the most thrilling, most exotic trips in the world **48**

A FISTFUL OF PESOS

. John Kreiger
Thinking of "getting away from it all" this summer? How about *really* getting away? Leave the ridiculous prices and crowded beaches to the *turistas* this time, and chase down some hard-core relaxation in the wilds of Central America **56**

FLYING IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

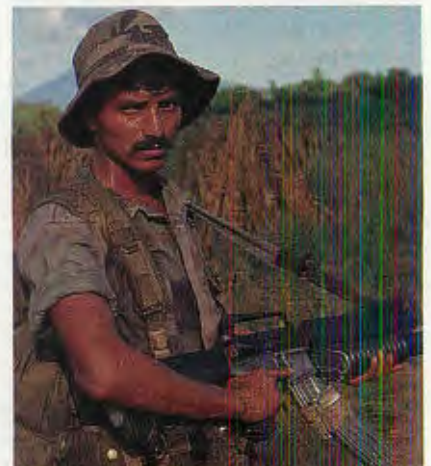
. Tom Bates
Former SOF editor becomes first Westerner to go on a *kamikaze* run in the deadly Mi-24 Hind — but lives to tell about it **60**

STONER'S

SUPER 63 Peter G. Kokalis
Finally, a close examination by SOF's technical editor of a weapon with an almost cult-like following — the Navy SEALs' Stoner **64**

El Salvador — Page 42

Photo: Steve Salisbury



SAS DARES IN THE GULF Spike Van Pelt
Their clandestine missions were seldom mentioned in mainstream media, but Britain's legendary SAS troops were alive and well in the Persian Gulf ... daring, and winning, as usual **25**

SHARP EDGE OF DESERT STORM Greg Walker
It may have been the most high-tech war of all time, but when U.S. troops headed to the Gulf, most of them made sure they had one of man's oldest weapons at their side — the knife **26**

MARINES FOR ALL SEASONS Robert J. Caldwell
Are U.S. Marines being sent in harm's way without proper planning? Do they have the right weapons and tactics to complete their missions? Stunning Coalition success made these questions moot during the war, but the Pentagon would be wise to address them before the next shots are fired **28**

DEATH TO THE TYRANT COCAINE James L. Pate
The DEA and U.S. Coast Guard take the battle to the source in the jungles of Bolivia — and hit wholesale coca paste buyers where it hurts **30**

KEYSTONE COMMANDOS Peter Douglas
The assignment would be dangerous — accompanying a Palestinian patrol to raid an Israeli position — but correspondent Peter Douglas had no idea *how* dangerous until he met the Keystone commandos that were to be his guides **36**

ANOTHER SALVO IN EL SALVADOR Steve Salisbury
SOF's senior foreign correspondent finds that even with supplies running low, El Salvador's civil war continues unabated. In this story, FMLN guerrillas and government forces fight it out in the perilous region of Usulután **42**

COLUMNS



Saudi Arabia — Page 70

Photo: "Mac" Dunnigan

SMOKE AND MIRRORS "Mac" Dunnigan
 How one SOF correspondent cheated, lied and fast-talked his way through miles of military red tape and regulations and managed to be there for the liberation of Kuwait City **70**

STUPID PRESS TRICKS Mike Williams
 SOF's intrepid correspondents found their biggest frustration in Saudia Arabia was their fellow journalists in the Riyadh Hilton **76**

OF MINES AND MEN Dale B. Cooper
 Left in the water for unsuspecting ships, mines are a sailor's greatest fear. Here's the story of how men of the sea protected themselves against these deadly surprise packages **78**

Stoner 63 — Page 64

Photo: courtesy Darryl Wilson and Gary Abrahamson



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 Relentless gun grabbers

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COVER

For the biggest story since *Soldier of Fortune* first hit the stands, we cared enough to send our very best. SOF's Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown covered Operation Desert Storm by himself, talking his way through roadblocks, traveling with the troops, hitching rides with Egyptian tankers and talking with soldiers everywhere he went. Here he snapped Marine Staff Sergeant Jeffrey Sammans, 28, Clearwater, Florida, at a Patriot missile site near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Photo: Robert K. Brown

FLAK



On a recent trip to Poland, former SOF editor Tom Bates met up with ... Well, you can see what he met up with. Note: The Polish army is *not* accepting applications these days. Photo: courtesy Tom Bates

DIFFERENT KIND OF WELCOME ...

Returning Desert Storm troops are receiving a well-deserved hero's welcome, and I think that is great. I would not want them to receive the same treatment troops returning from Vietnam received. However, I resent suggestions that Vietnam vets should take part in the recent festivities.

Decades have passed since we Vietnam vets returned to a jeering public, and in my opinion, it's just too damned late for the confetti and parades. Here is what I would consider an appropriate, belated welcome for Vietnam vets:

- 1) The American media and U.S. Congress should admit that *they* lost the Vietnam War, 2) The American media should admit that biased reporting was beneficial to the enemy, 3) The politicians should admit that they forced a "war of numbers" which they later used to discredit the military, and 4) Hanoi Jane, Ramsey Clark and their whole damned crew should be sentenced as traitors.

Wishful thinking, I know, so I'll never get my welcome; but I will not insult the Desert Storm troops by horning in on

theirs. Neither will I accept an "afterthought" parade for myself.

J.L. Echols
Satellite Beach, Florida
(Vietnam, Class of '69)

NAVAJO WARRIOR ...

I have enjoyed reading SOF for the last six years, but I have noticed there have been no Native Americans represented, such as the Navajo code-talkers of World War II. I am proud to say that I am a Navajo Indian.

I went through the Marine Corps' "Devil Pups" program back in '87. And although the U.S. government mistreated all Indian tribes, Native Americans have always been proud to serve Uncle Sam. To all Indian warriors past, present, and future, I want to say that I am proud of you all.

Eugene Tapahonso III
Shiprock, New Mexico

COMMANDANTE 380 ...

It was with profound sadness that I learned about the assassination of our mutual friend Colonel Enrique Bermudez, a man who gave a new definition to the term "freedom fighter."

I was privileged to be among the early trainers of the ragtag group of guerrillas that straggled out of Nicaragua to become a respected fighting force known as the Nicaraguan Democratic Front (FDN), the contras. Com-

mandante 380, the Colonel's *nom de guerre*, was the driving force and personality behind that movement. There have been few times in my life when I could say that I was in the presence of greatness, but my time with 380 was such a time.

The anal polyp that pulled the trigger in Managua and the fecal matter that sent him have robbed Nicaragua of a man who worked from consensus instead of confrontation, a man who should have been Nicaragua's postwar president. But the enemies of freedom never learn that they can't defeat people like Enrique, they can only kill them.

As long as a Nicaraguan raises his hand or voice against oppression, as long as the world remembers the contras' struggle against overwhelming odds, 380 will live on. For now, his friends can be content in the thought that St. Michael has another excellent battlefield commander putting on the heavenly armor.

John E. Padgett
Dana Point, California

AS IF "THE WORLD" CARED ...

Thank you very much for the article titled "Holiday in Hell" in the January issue of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. The Karen people and I deeply appreciate your consideration for our struggle for freedom and survival.

And where did the Saudi minister of information get his info on the Persian Gulf War? From several sources, no doubt, including lil' ol' SOF. Photo: David Peabody



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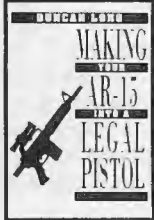
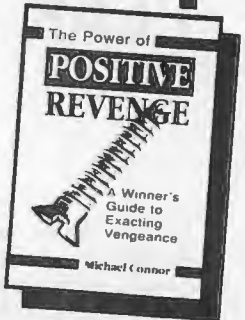


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A Winner's Guide to Exacting Vengeance

by Michael Connor

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An Inside Look
In the jungles and canals of Vietnam, U.S. Navy SEALs waged a war of terror against the Vietcong. This action-packed video shows SEALs in training, preparing for missions and hauling in terrified VC prisoners. Voice-overs of SEAL veterans tell you what it was like to go out on deadly excursions deep into enemy territory and the special skills it took to get back alive. Color, approx. 30 min., VHS only. **\$29.95**



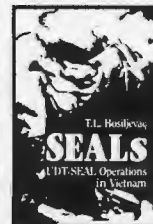
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Finally on film, George Hayduke's greatest revenge tricks, showing you how to turn the tables on bullies, bureaucrats, big business and other bad guys. More than 100 uproarious, ingenious schemes make getting even easier, safer and more fun! Rated "R" for revenge, *Get Even* is for entertainment purposes only. Color, 40 min., VHS only. **\$29.95**



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by George Hayduke
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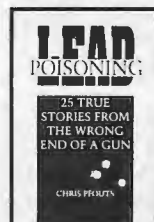
MANSTOPPERS

Selecting the Right Double-Action Pistol
This video will help you select the right double-action auto pistol for your personal defense needs. Technical advisors Col. Rex Applegate, Wiley Clapp, Tom Campbell and Chuck Karwan contributed to the evaluations of the latest autos from Colt, S&W, Ruger, Glock, SIG-Sauer and others. From the right caliber to the right safety, this video covers it all. Color, approx. 60 min., VHS only. **\$59.95**



FISTS, WITS, AND A WICKED RIGHT

Surviving on the Wild Side of the Street
by Marc "Animal" MacYoung
"It's awareness, wits and fists that will keep you safe out there, not some fancy Oriental fighting form," says Animal. Here, he gets down to the fine points and brutal technicalities of blows and targeting — the critical stuff that will keep you from becoming dead meat. 5 1/2 x 8 1/2, softcover, illus., 152 pp. **\$14.00**



LEAD POISONING

25 True Stories from the Wrong End of a Gun
by Chris Pfouts
Everyone, including you, runs the risk of being shot, either by intent or by accident. By reading what these shooting survivors have to say about their experience — the preceding signs, the lessons learned — you can learn how to avoid a bullet in the first place. An extraordinary book. 5 1/2 x 8 1/2, hardcover, 184 pp. **\$21.95**



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Major Walter, leader of the 7th Brigade in your story, blew up one enemy Burmese train near Kama Saing village yesterday. There were not less than 150 dead and wounded. Burmese army reaction? All villagers were ordered to pay 20,000 kyats each to the Burmese army. I think it is not necessary to tell you what happened to villagers who could not pay.

Fighting is intensifying every day. God bless you for telling the world what's happening here.

Prime Minister Ba Thin
Karen State (Kawthoolei)
Burma

TRoubles ABOUT TROUBLES ...

Thanks for a good May issue. I found fault, however, with Stan Martin's story, "Trouble in Tyrone." Northern Ireland was created by British oppression in the 1920s. Widespread discrimination was then implemented by the British, with the RUC playing a major role. The IRA re-emerged, and fighting has continued for the past 22 years.

No mention was made in the story of the so-called Stalker Affair or the more recent Stevens Inquiry, investigations of RUC officers working with loyalist death squads.

The problem is not so much that the British are ruling; the problem is that they are ruling so badly.

Brendan McCrudden
Chicago, Illinois

TURBO TYRANNY ...

I am a high-power service rifle competitor, and grew up in a town where a rifle hanging in a pickup truck window was commonplace. With all the attention being given to the disarming of honest citizens, it seems to me that our freedom is no longer being taken away little by little, but at a very rapid rate.

I, like many other people, have mailed letters and made phone calls to remind our elected officials of the promise they made to uphold our Second Amendment. I have sent money to support pro-gun legislation and fight anti-gun propaganda. I have talked to people who are "sitting on the fence" about the Second Amendment. We see every day what happens to people in countries with an unarmed population. SOF has the advantage of

being able to devote the time and effort to cover civil wars and revolutions all around the world, thus can see the dangers of gun control that the average person may not be able to see until it's too late. Unless it's already too late.

Daniel H. Young
Phoenix, Arizona

COINCIDENCE? ...

Now the truth comes out! I read the Bulletin Board item concerning Alan Mossberg's push for legislation to make it a federal crime for anyone to possess a gun without a locking device (April SOF).

Now we find out what is behind this concern for the safety of gun owners and their families. I just found an ad in a gun magazine for Cablelock, a firearm locking device made by Mossberg. What a coincidence!

Alan wants everyone to be required by law to have a lock, and at the same time, he has a gun for sale. "Get one at your local dealer," the ad says. What a great marketing idea. Next, he can push for legislation requiring everyone to buy at least one of everything his company makes.

Perhaps SOF could improve circulation figures by pushing for a federal law requiring everyone to subscribe to SOF! (I am a charter subscriber, by the way, so the law wouldn't affect me.)

Richard E. Murray
Lockport, New York

TWO-STARRED KUDOS ...

My compliments to you on a very excellent and accurate article in your May issue on the training of Kuwaiti soldiers for Operation Desert Storm. Fort Dix was proud of its role in transforming the Kuwaiti students into soldiers prepared to liberate their country.

Thank you for acknowledging our PAO team for their fine work. I, too, feel that they are an asset to Fort Dix. Also, thanks for sharing your patriotic work and for your efforts in seeing that this Army story received the positive coverage that it deserved. Keep up the good work.

Maj. Gen. James W. Wurman
Fort Dix, New Jersey

HERR GUN CONTROL COMMISSARS ...

Like most firearms owners, I oppose HR-7. However, I also oppose HR-1412. (HR-1412 is being supported by the NRA as an alternative to HR-7.)

HR-1412 seeks to establish an instant "phone check" in lieu of HR-7's waiting period. Outlaws get their weapons where they get their narcotics: on the black market. A seven-day waiting period or a two-minute phone check will not prevent outlaws from obtaining firearms.

Kentuckians enjoy some of the least restrictive firearms laws in the United States, and we intend to keep it that way. HR-7 and HR-1412 will infringe upon and eliminate constitutional rights that we hold to be ours.

Kentuckians do not ask governmental permission to obtain or dispense of firearms. I ask SOF readers to join me in vigorously supporting our Second Amendment rights by opposing both HR-7 and HR-1412.

Sasha C. Jankovic
Louisville, Kentucky

"The legal hallmark of a dictatorship has always been preventive law — the concept that a man is guilty until he is proved innocent by the rubber stamp of a commissar or a Gauleiter."

— Ayn Rand.

GORILLA GUERRILLAS ...

I hope you will answer some questions I have about Kokalis' review of the SKS "Para" rifle in your April issue. On page 81, he writes, "I have a Commonwealth FAL with a 14 1/2-inch length of pull and that is just perfect for me as I have the arms of an orangutan."

My questions are: Just what kinds of arms do orangutans carry besides the FAL? Are they used in gorilla warfare? I know this is kind of a "me Tarzan, you Jane" query, but am honestly curious, George. Please clarify.

Douglas MacKenzie
Santa Fe, New Mexico

SOF has forwarded your questions to Mr. Kokalis.

Something on your mind? Send letters to: FLAK, c/o SOF, PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306 ✉

A "Cut Above" The Rest!

Introducing the new Gryphon M30A1

A knife is only as good as the materials from which it's made, and from point to pommel, the new Gryphon M30A1 is unsurpassed! It should be—it was designed by world famous knife maker Robert Terzuola. Absolutely no compromise has been made to bring you the M30A1—the finest combat knife money can buy. You will feel the quality of the M30A1 the first time you pick it up. It's produced by skilled craftsmen in Seki, Japan. Nestled in the mountains, Seki has been Japan's sword-making capital for centuries.

The best blade money can buy

The M30A1's razor-sharp 6 1/4" blade is made from ATS-34 steel, the choice of most premier custom knife makers in America—and what a blade it is! The massive full-length tang extends to, and becomes part of, the lanyard hole for maximum strength. Each blade is double hollow-ground by hand, expertly sub-zero quenched and double tempered for added durability and edge retention. Each blade is Rockwell tested (Rc 58-59) to assure perfection. The Rockwell test mark is clearly visible on the blade of each M30A1. But that's only the beginning.

A handle you can hold onto

Without a properly designed handle, your knife is next to worthless. The Gryphon M30A1 has a handle designed to fit anyone's hand comfortably. The handle is made from durable DuPont Zytel which has been UV and heat stabilized—the result, a handle that is impervious to the elements. You'll get a secure grip in any position because the handle is lightly checkered and slightly ridged for a positive, non-slip grip. The low top guard allows you to place your thumb on the back of the blade for maximum control and extra leverage when cutting.

A sheath truly worthy of this knife

A knife as fine as the Gryphon M30A1 deserves a superior sheath. Gryphon Knives realized the importance of a top-quality sheath and teamed up with renowned sheath-maker Blackie Collins to create something special. The result of Blackie's handicraft is a fantastic Cordura sheath, made specially for the Gryphon M30A1. It's stitched with heavy thread and quadruple-riveted. It's lined with a thick rubber welt to protect the user and the knife blade. And it's finished off with a sturdy snap closure which keeps your knife secure in its sheath. A Bianchi military-spec belt fastener is included for use with G.I. pistol belts. A handy leg tie-down keeps the sheath doubly secure.

An ironclad guarantee

Each Gryphon knife is backed in full by an ironclad lifetime guarantee against defects. We know you'll love your Gryphon M30A1. But just in case you don't, we'll take it back, no questions asked. Just try it for 30 days. Use it. See how it performs for you. If you're not completely satisfied the Gryphon M30A1 is everything we claim, simply return it for a prompt, courteous refund.

For fastest service,
USA & CANADA Toll-Free Order Line
call **1-800-231-1272**

or call 1-208-376-0430 or fax 1-208-376-7608



**GRYPHON
KNIVES**

GRYPHON M30A1 SPECIFICATIONS

Blade steel	ATS-34
Rc hardness	58-59
Blade length	6 1/4"
Length overall	11 1/4"
Blade thickness	3/16"
Weight, knife	8.4 oz
Weight, sheath	6.8 oz
Made in	Japan

Mail order form

Yes, please rush me _____ Gryphon M30A1 combat knives @ \$225 each. I understand that if I am not completely satisfied I may return my order within 30 days for a full refund. Please include the latest Cutlery Shoppe catalog with my order.

Your Name _____

Address _____

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Please charge my VISA, MASTERCARD or DISCOVER

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\$5 to 48 states -- \$10 for C.O.D. (cash only-48 states) -- \$7 to P.O. Box, APO, FPO, AK, HI, PR & VI -- \$10 to CANADA. Foreign orders please call, write or fax for shipping costs.



BULLETIN BOARD



SOF honcho Bob Brown accepts the *Freedom Fighter of the Year* award from members of the Firearms Coalition of Colorado for his efforts on behalf of Second Amendment rights. Presenting the plaque were (left to right) Len Horner, Ed Cole, Bill Pittman, (Brown), Bill Jones and Gil Angelotti. Photo: SOF staff

OOPS OFFICE OPENS ...

The U.S. Army has established a "Center for Combat Identification Technology" at Ft. Meade, Maryland, to help prevent deaths of American troops from "friendly" fire. The center is presently studying how vehicles might identify themselves by broadcasting signals via light or radio.

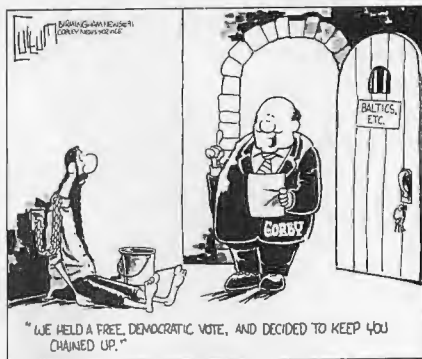
The first two soldiers to die in combat in Operation Desert Storm, Spec. Jeffrey Middleton and Pfc. Robert Talley, were killed on 17 February 1991. Lt. Col. Ralph Hayles, an Apache attack helicopter battalion commander engaging targets from his AH-64 in violation of 1st Infantry Division (Mech) guidelines, fired a Hellfire missile at the 2nd Armored Division Bradley IFV in which Middleton and Talley were riding. Six others were injured. Lt. Col. Hayles was relieved of his command.

COLT GETS M16 CONTRACT ...

The U.S. Army recently awarded a new contract for production of 12,000 M16A2 rifles and spares to Colt's Manufacturing Co. Inc., New Hartford, Connecticut, the original producer of the M16 series for the Army.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL RESEARCHER ...

NORMANDY VETS: Your taped oral history is wanted by Stephen E. Ambrose, Director, The Eisenhower Center, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA 70148; (504) 286-7110. Contact him for details. **PUSAN PERIMETER VETS:** Writer and "Wolfhound Regiment" vet Uzal W. Ent is writing



history of that campaign — wants foxhole-level stories. Write him at 37 Golfview Rd., Camp Hill, PA 17011. **KOREAN HOSTILE FIRE INCIDENTS** (post-war, especially 1966-1969) are of interest to writer David C. So-damann. Contact him at 1045 Kentucky St., Apt. 5, Lawrence, KS 66044.

REUNIONS ...

1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (July 4-6), Ft. Hood, TX. Contact: First Team Reunion; (800) 234-9313. **720TH MP BATTALION** (August 9-11), Salinas, CA. Contact: Joe Selovich; (414) 654-0517. **USS INDEPENDENCE CV-62** (July 11-14), Washington, D.C. Contact: Denis Bagley; (908) 819-0359. **EMPIRE STATE VIETNAM VETS ENCAMPMENT** (July 12-14), Peekskill, NY. Contact: ESVV; (914) 592-4438. **USS CALLAWAY APA-35** (August 5-9), Minneapolis, MN. Contact: CDR R.L. Stamback; (813) 481-0359. **PT BOATS, BASES AND TENDERS** (August 30-Sept. 3), Pittsburgh, PA. Contact: Alyce Guthrie; (901) 755-8440. **USS PORTLAND CA-33** (Sept. 2-6), Portland, ME. Contact: Ted Waller; (214) 341-7152. **NAVY MAIL SERVICE VETS** (Sept. 10-15), Buffalo, NY. Contact: Maynard Hamilton; (703) 845-5428. **92nd AIR DROME SQUADRON** (Sept. 11-15), St. Louis, MO. Contact: Larry Kabat; (904) 973-2306.

SALVO ANNIVERSARY JUMP ...

Qualified military static line, qualified mil/civvie free-fall parachutists note: Join *Battalon de Paracaidistas* for a 28th Anniversary, six-day and five-night fiesta and jump in El Salvador. Jump and party with the best from 26 September to 1 October for only \$1495, round trip from Houston. Receive El Salvadoran free-fall wings and certificate; Salvo Special Forces wings and certificate if you jump with them (an additional \$600). First-come, first-served. Secure your reservations, get details from Harry Clafin, Rt 1, Box 88, Bronough, MO 64728; phone (417) 843-3555. ✕

Showing that one picture is still worth a thousand words is this propaganda leaflet the good guys dropped for the benefit of Saddam's legions in the Gulf.



The ACTION Video Library

From PALADIN

These videos are your source for insider information. Each one has been specially produced to give you the edge. When you need knowledge, training and information, we deliver.



U.S. NAVY SEALS

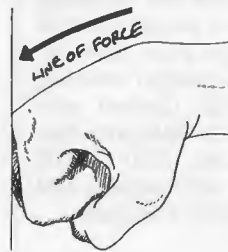
**World War II
Korea
Vietnam • Middle East
Grenada • Panama**

Elite warriors of stealth, sabotage and surreptitious missions of death, U.S. Navy SEALs have been the U.S. military's shock force in 50 years of global conflict. In this thrilling new video, you'll witness live footage of SEALs in action from WWII to today's "dirty little wars." Guam, Normandy, Inchon, the Mekong Delta, Grenada, Panama – SEALs have fought wherever their special, deadly skills have been needed to instill terror in the enemy. Much of this material has never been available to the public . . . until now. Color, approx. 35 min., VHS only. **\$29.95**

BLACK MEDICINE: THE VIDEO

Vital Targets, Maximum Punishment

Here's a graphic demonstration of how to best exploit the vulnerable vital points of the human anatomy. The instructors in this film know the subject well – not only are they black belts in a variety of martial arts, but they have worked as bouncers in the most violent bars and roadhouses from New Jersey to Texas. **Black Medicine: The Video** focuses on the strikes that these men know from experience will put a man down. Debunking the common myth that there is one magic shot that will drop someone every time, this video demonstrates which techniques work best against specific targets on the human body. It explicitly shows not only where to strike but also how to create an opening for the blow and how to achieve enough power to break an opponent's bones, shut off the blood to his brain or drop him unconscious to the pavement. *Warning:* Some of the techniques shown in this film are only appropriate for life-threatening situations. Therefore, it is for information purposes only! Color, approx. 50 min., VHS only. **\$29.95**



EXPERT LOCK PICKING

State-of-the-Art Lock Picking Secrets

Let one of the best lock pickers in the business demonstrate the fastest ways to open locks. Special see-through locks show how picks, rakes, snap guns and electronic picks exploit the weaknesses of everything from simple wafers to complex pin tumblers. This video is a must for professional locksmiths. For information purposes only. Color, approx. 50 min., VHS only. **\$59.95**

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Videotapes are nonreturnable. Damaged tapes will be replaced.

GET EVEN

The Video of Dirty Tricks

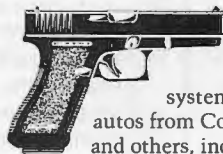
When life gets ugly, you have to play dirty. George Hayduke shows you how in outrageous, indescribable ways that have to be seen to be believed. This video takes up where the Get Even books leave off, and it is for serious revenge seekers only. Video vengeance is not for the faint of heart or weak of stomach. It contains some of the vilest, sickest, most humiliating – yet effective – tricks ever seen. They cost little or no money and can be executed by – or against – anyone. So if you know some bullies who need to be busted (and this applies to their anatomies and their lives in general), turn all the weapons at your disposal against them. What weapons? Chicken parts, sewage, excrement, roadkill . . . *nothing* is too disgusting! For entertainment purposes only. Color, approx. 40 min., VHS only. **\$29.95**




MANSTOPPERS

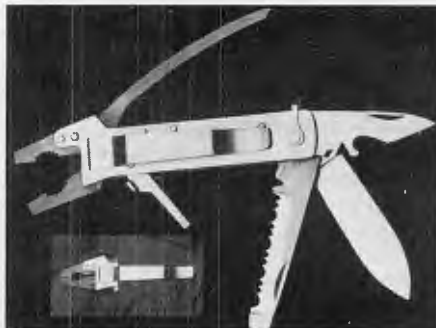
Selecting the Right Double-Action Pistol

If your life depends on the performance of your double-action automatic pistol, you had better be sure it can deliver in a life-or-death situation. This video will help you select the right pistol for your personal-defense needs. Technical advisors Col. Rex Applegate, Wiley Clapp, Tom Campbell and Chuck Karwan participated in this unique evaluation. Discover the most effective calibers, efficient operating systems and desirable characteristics of the latest autos from Colt, S&W, Ruger, Beretta, Glock, SIG-Sauer and others, including certain anxiously awaited pistols not yet seen by the public. Should you go with a 9mm, .40 S&W, 10mm or .45 ACP? What are the advantages of the various safeties? What about weight, magazine capacity, concealability and recoil? Take advantage of the decades of practical handgun experience these men have acquired, spare yourself hours of research and pinpoint the exact gun for your specific needs. Color, approx. 60 min., VHS only. **\$59.95**



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ADVENTURE QUARTERMASTER



TOOLCLIP FROM SOG

Multipurpose knife/tools have been with us for years, but Al Mar seems to have reawakened interest in this genre with his "4X4" offering last year.

Now, SOG has joined the party with its "Toolclip." Adding a heavy-duty clip for secure fastening to a pocket, belt or pack, and 13 powerful features including full-jaw pliers, wire

cutter, large screwdriver, wire stripper (both large and fine), bottle opener, serrated blade among other features, it looks like a winner. Suggested retail is \$69.95 and an optional nylon sheath is available. Contact SOG Specialty Knives, Dept. SOF, PO Box 1024, Edmonds, WA 98020; phone (206) 771-6230.

MANSTOPPERS

Manstoppers, a new video being released this month, will help you cut through all the misinformation and hype about how to select the right pistol for your personal defense needs. You'll discover the most effective calibers, efficient operating systems, and most desirable characteristics of more than 21 different series of pistols from Colt, S&W, Ruger, Beretta, Glock, H&K, SIG-Sauer, Taurus and others, including some not yet seen by the public.

You'll get answers to questions like: Should I go with 9mm, .40 S&W, 10mm or .45 ACP? What about recoil? And cost? You'll even witness some of the most incredible displays of accurate handgun shooting ever seen on film. Technical advisers Colonel Rex Applegate, Wiley Clapp, Tom Campbell and Chuck Karwan contributed to and participated in this unique evaluation.

The VHS (color) video runs approximately 60 minutes and sells for \$59.95. *Manstoppers: Selecting the Right Double-Action Pistol* can be ordered from Paladin Press, Dept. SOF, PO Box 1307, Boulder, CO 80306. A handy order form can be found in Paladin's ad in this issue.

.50 CAL. DESERT EAGLE

Either this month or early next month, Magnum Research will introduce its new .50 caliber Magnum Desert Eagle pistol. This high-caliber cannon purports to provide over 60% more stopping power than their .44. Despite this, Magnum Research told us shooters have reported only slightly increased recoil over the .44.

Because the round this handgun uses is unique, a supply of ammunition will be shipped with each pistol. (Ammo and reloading equipment for the weapon should soon be available from commercial sources.) Suggested retail will be around \$1,200. Contact your local gun store or Magnum Research Inc., Dept. SOF, 7110 University Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55432; phone (612) 574-1868.



OSS SLEEVE DAGGER

Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agents, known as the "shadow warriors" of World War II, often required concealable weapons to carry out their clandestine missions behind enemy lines. One weapon developed for this purpose — the OSS Sleeve Dagger — is now being authentically reproduced by H.G. Long & Co. of Sheffield, England.

The 3 1/2-inch blade Sleeve Dagger comes with a concealable leather sheath that can be either double-straped to your forearm (under the shirt sleeve) or worn on your leg. Daggers by design are not good cutting knives but are ideal for stabbing. The OSS Sleeve Dagger is no exception, with its three blade-flats forming a narrow, pointed tip. Standard retail price is \$99, but Cutlery Shoppe is offering SOF readers this classic for only \$69.95 plus \$5 S&H. To order call 1-800-231-1272 or 1-208-376-0430 and use your credit card. Orders may also be mailed with check or money order to Cutlery Shoppe, Dept. SOF, 5461 Kendall St., Boise, ID 83706. ✂

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I'm talking about making extra money in the fascinating mail order business. I can show you how to start in your spare time. It's interesting, exciting, and can mean big dollars for you in a business that will give you a great deal of personal satisfaction.

Think of all the mail order ads you see. Millions of dollars are exchanging hands every day. Why not learn how to get your share of dollars in this fabulous business? Don't think for one moment that you can't do it—I'll prove you can. Numerous mail order ads are run by individuals such as yourself who quietly bank profits every month or buy those extras that they want.

Best of all, with my instructions you can run your mail order business right from your home. You can control the growth of your business, either keeping it small or pyramiding your profits.

SECRETS REVEALED

The field of mail order is filled with success stories in which people start with an idea but little money and make fortunes. Once you apply my success plan, it will be like having your own oil well. There is no end to the variety of ways to make money in mail order.

I, personally, love selling how-to-books. I'll show you exactly how I recently created a 48-page best seller based on the idea of spoofing exercise-and-diet books.

FOLLOW MY SUCCESS

I've been successfully selling how-to books for 25 years, and I'm willing to share my secrets and business know-how with you. In fact, I'll show you how to make money selling the same type of books. Haven't you purchased how-to books and don't you know people who continually buy them?

The possibilities for selling this type of book are unlimited. Think of the wide variety of titles—*How to Get Better Gas Mileage*, *How to Improve Your Relationships*, *How to Grow Plants*, *How to Win at Gambling*, *How to Make Money in Real Estate*, and on and on.

QUICK MONEY SECRET

One very important section in my book is worth the price of the entire book. For the first time, I reveal the inner secrets of mail order experts on how to get free magazine ads that can quickly put you on the road to riches. Sound too good to be true? Just read Chapter 13.

PROVEN FACTS—NOT THEORIES

I offer practical, tested, how-to information on successfully selling books or products. Furthermore, I guarantee there's plenty of room for anyone who is seriously willing to follow my blueprint for success.

WHY BUY MY BOOK?

I know you have seen ads on other mail order books, and you may be wondering if you can really believe my ad. My answer is, "Absolutely yes." If it isn't all I say it is, your money will be refunded immediately.

Today—do yourself a real favor. Send away for my book. You'll be pleasantly surprised and delighted with your newly found knowledge, especially when those beautiful, green dollars start rolling in. The future is yours. You are not only what you are today, but also what you choose to become tomorrow.

HAPPY READERS' CERTIFIED SUCCESS STORIES

Here is proof positive from readers of *How to Get Rich in Mail Order*. Wouldn't it be terrific to see your success story here? Of course, not everyone makes big money; however, my book gives you the opportunity on a money-back guarantee basis.

\$18,000 IN THREE WEEKS

Your mail order book has changed my life. I followed your instructions and ran a test ad. The results—\$18,000 in the first three weeks!

I know that I am on my way to mail order riches!

Those checks look so beautiful. Thank you, Mr. Powers, for writing the book that made it possible.

Victor W.
Carpinteria, California 93013

\$20,000 IN SIX MONTHS

By using only a couple of your suggestions, I personally made \$20,000 in a six-month period. Melvin, your book is priceless and I highly recommend it to anyone.

Steve M.
Manhattan Beach, California 90266

\$30,000 IN ONE MONTH

You have written the best book on mail order. After reading your book and following your advice, I did \$30,000 worth of business in one month. Many thanks.

Jack W.
Los Angeles, California

\$40,000 THE FIRST MONTH From a laid off Detroit auto worker

Your book on mail order is, without reservation, the finest and most complete book I've ever read. The tips and instructions showed me how to write a winning ad that grossed me \$40,000 in the first month, and the money is still rolling in.

I want to thank you for all your help and to congratulate you on writing and publishing a great book.

George B.
Canton, Michigan 48187

\$93,000 IN 28 DAYS

I earned over \$93,000 in one 28-day period using your techniques. Never before have I made so much money with so little effort. Thanks for your good advice.

Steve H.
Indianapolis, Indiana 46226

\$100,000 IN FOUR MONTHS

Your mail order book is great! Using your techniques and expertise, I made over \$100,000 in four months. Keep up the good work.

Barrie K.
Alto, Michigan 49302

\$1,000,000 IN FIVE MONTHS

I was completely broke and in the depths of depression when I read your material. Believe it or not, in five months I did \$1,000,000 worth of business and I am now in the process of purchasing a building worth close to \$500,000.

My whole life has been changed due to you. How can I ever thank you?

George C.
Los Angeles, California 90038

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Mail order is my business and my hobby. It's fun, it's creative, it's fascinating—and it means big money, too! Your secret dreams can come true because there are millions of customers out there just waiting to send you their dollars for your product or service.

To experience the joy of shaking thousands of dollars from stacks of envelopes addressed to you, send for *How to Get Rich in Mail Order* by Melvin Powers. 336 pages, over 200 pages of illustrations, 8½" x 11" size.

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Here is my check () money order () for \$15 plus \$1 postage. Please send the book *How to Get Rich in Mail Order* to me immediately.

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California residents please add 65¢ sales tax.

I WAS THERE

by Lisa Suhay

Spy vs. Spy in Tel Aviv

DURING a three-week tour of journalistic duty in Tel Aviv, Israel, photographer Jeff Bustraan and I found ourselves caught up in more international intrigues than we had bargained for.

Apparently being a freelance journalist is a popular cover for espionage agents from Canada, Ireland and the United States — so popular in fact that you can't really tell the players without a score card.

Within 48 hours of our arrival in Tel Aviv, we were being approached from all angles by agents from all the aforementioned countries who thought that either a) we were the second-string team sent from home to replace them, or b) that I would make the perfect blind courier for moving information out of the country, via my sealed/declared/censored information packets.

The first was a man who identified himself as Joseph, a Canadian secret service agent, who said his main function was the investigation of Israeli companies the Canadian government is considering investing in.

Joseph took us up to his executive suite at the Tel Aviv Hilton, the official press center, to show us his battery of sound-sensitive photographic equipment and electronic darkroom equipment.

Then he took us up to the Hilton's roof to show us how to tap into CNN's satellite dish for illegal transmissions to Canada. When I attempted to photo-

graph the view, Joseph nearly leaped off the roof to avoid being in the photo.

Finally he gave us a full breakdown of his setup. Somehow he had managed to actually get hired by a prominent Canadian daily newspaper as a photographer, so was drawing a double salary from both the government and the newspaper, the latter supplying a suite and a healthy expense account.

Our second encounter came when we traveled to the Old City in Jerusalem and were met and followed by a young Arab boy.

"Madame, please take a picture with me," he begged. After being dogged for an hour I consented to the photo, after

which he disappeared around a corner where two Arab men appeared to instruct on him what to do next.

Then the little boy came back. "You come back here tomorrow and bring me the picture," he said. "You come back right here tomorrow and I'll be waiting."

When we returned to the hotel and showed the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) officers the photo and recounted the story, they became agitated, warning us, "Under no circumstances are you to return to that city. We don't need another kidnapping. That's one of their favorite ploys."

By our fourth day in Tel Aviv, we were feeling older and wiser — like old hands at international intrigue. But with all our vast experience we were not

prepared to deal with the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

While sitting in a press conference at the Hilton, two very seedy looking men, one looking like a heroin-addicted Peter O'Toole, the other being the picture of a shabby, poorly traveled American hack journalist, chose to light down on either side of me.

They began politely, asking me harmless, friendly questions in their British accent and southern twang, respectively. "You haven't been here very long have you? If you need any help getting around the city we have a car ... When are you planning on returning to the States?"

Before I could answer any of their questions a small security detail from the Hilton Hotel seized, then quietly escorted them from the building for lacking valid government press office cards.

The next morning they both appeared in our hotel, which was across the street from the Hilton, and acted as if we were long lost cousins. Our highly principled hotel manager had given them my name and room number.

"I was hoping that you could manage to do me the favor of taking back a letter to a friend of mine in the States," the tall Englishman said. "The mail here is so slow and it wouldn't take up too much room in your luggage."

After politely refusing to come to his aid we left the hotel for the day, only to return to a battery of phone messages from a Michael Burke (the Englishman). "Mr. Burke called from Ben Gurion Airport and must speak to you ... Mr. Burke will call again."

After informing the IDF of the whole tangled intrigue, we were told to "just act natural the next time he calls and try to get more information so we can get him."

We didn't have long to wait. His call came just as we entered our hotel room.

"I have a top story for you on how Russian immigrants in Tel Aviv are smuggling out information to the Iraqis about where the Patriot bases are located," the British voice on the other end of the line said. "Meet me at the Milk and Honey Cafe on Ben Yehuda Street and I'll tell you all about it."

I agreed, asking for a postponement



In appropriately clandestine photo, author Lisa Suhay is snapped talking with two suspected spies in a Tel Aviv cafe. Box hanging from her right shoulder holds a gas mask. Photo: Jeff Bustraan

WINGS OF GLORY

The definitive pewter sculpture of
the U.S. Navy F-14 Tomcat.



Shown smaller than actual size of
8 1/4" in length. Scale 1:90.



It's a major triumph in the eternal fight for freedom! And this exciting commemorative sculpture will forever honor those who risked everything in freedom's cause.

Recapturing all the majesty and power of America's F-14 fighter jet, this dramatic symbol of superiority in the skies is packed with detail, from its missiles to its historic "swing wings" that can change configuration in mid-flight.

The issue price for this spectacular display piece: Just \$195, payable in convenient monthly installments. Exclusively from The Franklin Mint.

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Intricately sculptured, richly detailed.



Positioned on its own hardwood
and metal display,
this exciting sculpture soars
dramatically skyward.

Order Form

Please mail by July 31, 1991.

The Franklin Mint
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of 25 minutes with the excuse that I had to freshen up and find a taxi. In reality Jeff and I returned to the Hilton and told the IDF where to find its man.

"All we need you to do now is to meet him there at the cafe and point him out to the Israeli police," the agent said. "If we send IDF officials then the whole press center will be all over it. If the police bring him in then it won't attract as much attention."

At the cafe I was greeted by Burke and two Russians who proceeded to discuss my luggage, its contents, and fine American jazz music, rather than espionage. In the interim, Jeff shot photos of the entire meeting while waiting for the Israeli police to arrive.

Then Burke began to explain that he was working for the IRA and that there was vital information that needed to get out of Israel "to help the cause and those who sympathize with it."

When the police finally came they neither spoke much English nor had any clue as to why the IDF had summoned them to arrest some unknown Englishman. The situation rapidly deteriorated into a scene wherein one officer held the three men at bay while I explained the situation in Russian (I don't speak Hebrew) to a Russian waiter who then translated to the IDF in Hebrew.

"They're with the IRA," I kept

repeating to the officers.

"What are they going to do," the officer asked, "tax someone to death?"

I briefly considered explaining the subtle differences between the IRS and IRA and the fact that both could be considered terrorist organizations, but I felt that would do little to help the situation.

"I'll kill you for this, you American bitch," Burke said. "You look so Irish, but you don't know the first thing about hard times like we do." (I have red hair, green eyes and fair skin.)

By the time we returned to the Hilton with our prisoner (the IDF had only sent the police to arrest the Englishman, so it seemed like overkill to pick up the two alleged KGB agents), the IDF agents we had dealt with before were nowhere to be found. In their places sat two new officers.

"They went to lunch," the new agents said. "We haven't been briefed on this, so we'll just photocopy the Englishman's passport and let him go for now."

Two weeks passed, during which time we saw Burke several times on the streets of Tel Aviv. Also, his American friend, who claimed to be with a Tampa, Florida-based weekly paper began to appear again at regular briefings.

Finally, just four days before we

were due to leave Israel, an American, a self-confessed (he showed us the badges) U.S. Marshall/CIA man attached to the IDF (who also claimed to be an advertising agency owner) came rushing up to me.

"There's a guy from Tampa who keeps hanging around the press center. I saw him talk to you," he said. "Do you know anything about him? I was assigned to watch him while he's over here."

After commending him on the bang-up surveillance job he was doing, I launched into the whole story.

I was able to get the American's name by accessing the list of journalists who get releases on press conferences and finding that there was only one on the whole list from Tampa.

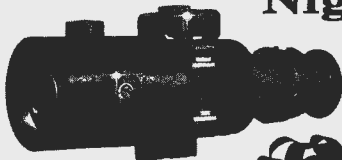
The Marshall learned that Michael Burke (probably not his real name) had entered Israel illegally through Egypt and the Gaza Strip, and was actually Irish, not English, as he claimed. Of the American, little was known.

The last words the IDF and the Marshall had to say to me were, "We appreciate all your help. It's just a matter of time now till we get them. Now that you've heard all this, just forget what you know."

To my knowledge, neither the Irishman nor the American were ever apprehended. ☒

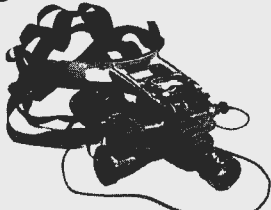
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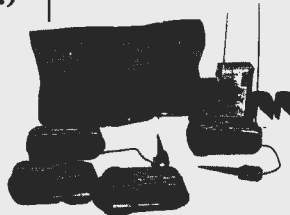


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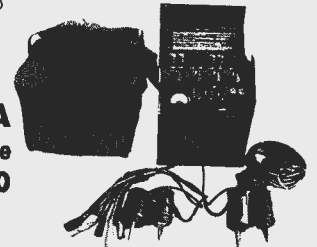
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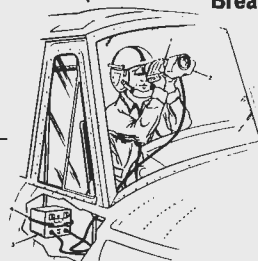
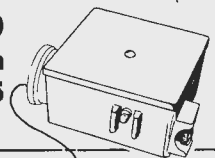


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WORLD SITREP

3

BELGIUM

CSFR, Poland, Hungary courting NATO for membership; NATO sympathetic — not receptive ... Belgium (35-mile coastline) sent navy vessels *Iris*, *Myosotis*, *Zinnia*, *Dianthus* and *Wielingen* to duty in Gulf.

2

ALBANIA

After 52 years, diplomatic relations with United States ... Widespread unrest, some 20,000 flee to Italy; government ordered ships offshore, inaccessible to refugees ... Fighting/violence in wake of recent election killed several.

1

AFGHANISTAN

Rumors of spring offensive; Khost abandoned, overrun. Hezb-i-Islami (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) under criticism for human rights violations — political killings, attacks on women's programs, assassination of mujahideen.

4

BURMA

Five men, alleged Karens from Manerplaw, sentenced to death for attempt on rail station; 10 others given 20 years ... Regime buying Mi-2 attack choppers (from Poland), AK-47s (N. Korea), training (Singapore), G-4 ground-attack craft (Yugoslavia), F-7M fighters (PRC).

5

CUBA

Four died on 12-day raft escape to Miami; two survived ... Control over medicines restricted, prices raised ... Castro says USSR turmoil disrupting supplies of steel, wood.

6

GERMANY

Twelve indicted for aiding Iraq's poison gas production.

7

GIBRALTAR

Peace of the Rock: 287 years of British rule end, security given to local Gibraltar Regiment.

8

GREECE

Police captured Abdulrahim Khaled, Palestinian convicted in absentia by Italy for 1985 hijacking of *Achille Lauro*. Italy wants extradition.

9

INDIA

Granted asylum to Burmese political refugees, including three candidates from League for Democracy.

10

IRAN

Brit Roger Cooper, arrested five years ago as spy, set free; had been given concurrent 10-year and death sentences.

12

ITALY

Palestinians Youssuf Sa'ad and Mohammed Issa Abbas, convicted in *Achille Lauro* hijacking, released for good behavior, deported to Algeria.

15

LATVIA

In Gorbachev's "plebiscite" — with balloting at Soviet army barracks — some journalists voted five times.

13

JORDAN

Supplied munitions to Iraq during war, still being considered for \$27 million in U.S. military aid.

14

YUGOSLAVIA

Serbia: intermittent revolts — Croatia: intermittent revolts.



29

VIETNAM

Hanoi steamed over Bulgarian incident with Vietnamese guest workers in Sofia — one killed, several seriously injured by police. Protest sent to Sofia; some Vietnamese want break in relations. Contracts expired, can't leave, guest workers getting in trouble.

28

USSR

Stashing 10,000-plus modern tanks, 4,000 armored vehicles, 20,000-plus artillery pieces behind Ural mountains to avoid destruction under CFE treaty ... Some 20% of Soviet draftees in autumn 1990 call-up failed to show up ... Prices on food and consumer goods double/triple in one jump; effect mitigated — few goods available anyway.

27

TOGO

To save 24-year regime, President Eyadema agreed to demands of democratic reformers, including amnesty, moves toward multiparty system.

26

THAILAND

Nearly 200 killed in wreck, explosion of tractor-trailer ... General Manoon Roopkachorn, former aid to PM Chatichai Choonhavan, underground since coup, now sought by junta regarding assassination plots in early 1980s ... Caretaker government in place, junta still in control.

25

TAIWAN

Three coastguard officers boarded PRC fishing vessel, were overpowered and taken to PRC. Red Cross negotiating release.

24

SWEDEN

Incidence of alien subs in Swedish waters higher than year before ... Officials ruled out consideration of Swedish tank, leaving M1A2 Abrams, German Leopard 2 in competition.

23

SRI LANKA

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ambush kills 44 soldiers; highest single loss in decade ... Minister of Defense Ranjan Wijeratne killed by bomb, also killing five police, 25 civilians. PM Dingiri Banda Wijetunge, appointed new minister of state for defense, offered to open talks with rebels.

22

SOUTH KOREA

Will seek admission to U.N. this year — alone if no agreement with North for joint seating.

16

MALAYSIA

Plans 12,000-man mechanized RDF, manned from infantry, ranger, commando troops; shopping for choppers, light field guns, SAMs, ICVs, amphibious tanks, assault landing craft.

18

NICARAGUA

Police arrested Sandinista army veteran in connection with assassination of contra leader Enrique Bermudez.

21

PHILIPPINES

Broke communist Gs, military rebels both blamed for increased bank, armored car robberies ... Imelda Marcos requests passport; President Aquino says Ms. Marcos may return, may face theft charges.

17

MEXICO

Mexico City meetings between El Salvadoran government, FMLN raising hope in some quarters.

19

NORTH KOREA

Soviet newspaper Izvestia closing Pyongyang office. Soviet news agency Tass announced plans for Seoul bureau with Yonghap News Agency.

20

PAKISTAN

Minister for local government/rural development resigned over Pakistani involvement in Gulf Coalition.



IN REVIEW

THEY LIVE BY THE SWORD, by Colonel Jan Breytenbach (Lemur Books, 1990, PO Box 1645, Alberton 1450, Republic of South Africa), is the story of an unconventional battalion, fighting in an unconventional and occasionally confusing and chaotic war, written by an unconventionally professional soldier.

In 1975, following the collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, political and military conditions in Angola became very complicated. A coalition of anti-Portuguese guerrilla forces immediately broke up, with each faction trying to achieve dominance.

Communists, heavily supported logistically and reinforced by Cuban troops, drove the Angolan National Liberation Front (FNLA) and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Complete Independence of Angola (UNITA) forces back into the bush, then formed a government based in Luanda.

UNITA soon reorganized and resumed guerrilla operations, this time against the communist regime rather than the Portuguese. The FNLA, however, dissolved, leaving hundreds of its fighters on their own, but still motivated and combat capable.

South African intelligence officers correctly assessed that Angola would become a haven for terrorists operating against not only South West Africa (SWA; now Namibia), but also South Africa itself.

The officers convinced political and military leaders that action was needed to deter infiltration and make the Angolan government pay heavily for its support of terrorism. That action took many forms, one being to give their support to Savimbi's growing UNITA army. Another was to form the remnants of the FNLA into their own battalion, designated at first only by the number "32."

32 Battalion's missions were to keep the communists from attaining total control in Angola and to destroy South West Africa Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) guerrilla bases in southern Angola.

Breytenbach describes his dismay when first confronted with the polyglot troops designated to fulfill this mission: "I stared distastefully and with sick foreboding at the most miserable, underfed, ragged and villainous bunch of

.....
"I stared
distastefully and
with sick
foreboding at the most
miserable,
underfed, ragged and
villainous bunch of
troops I had ever seen
in my life."
.....

troops I had ever seen in my life."

Sobered, perhaps, but undaunted, he proceeded to fashion this group of volunteer, anticommunist, black Angolans into a professional, competent bunch of soldiers — instilled with loyalty, high morale, and a sense of being part of the "32" family.

Breytenbach's love for his men shines through his brusque prose and in the sometimes irregular way in which he provisioned and trained them. Also, his loyalties were always first to his troops, and second to politicians and their demands in Pretoria. **THEY LIVE BY THE SWORD** is the fascinating and highly recommended chronicle of Breytenbach's years with "32," and of a unit widely regarded as the most successful in South Africa's campaign against communist influence in Africa.

This book, and just about any other ever written on military conflict in South Africa, can be obtained from Alec Kaplan & Son, PO Box 890638, Lyndhurst, Johannesburg 2106, South Africa.

— Review by Major Robert MacKenzie, *SOF's Contributing Editor for Unconventional Operations.*

The Army Aviation motto is "Above the Best." My flight school classmate, Jim Little, exemplified that motto.

He was a quiet and introspective Vietnam veteran, who received two Distinguished Flying Crosses and 50 Air Medals during his two tours and 2,000 combat hours in Vietnam.

Disgusted with post-Vietnam reduc-

tions-in-force that discarded many of the Army's best combat pilots while retaining ticket-punching REMFs, Little resigned after 12 years of service. He then caught a contract with Bell Helicopter International Inc., teaching helicopter tactics to Iranian military students.

He moved on to a series of flying jobs in Alaska, and then became an Alaska State Trooper. As a trooper, he was awarded the Medal of Valor for saving his partner's life.

Damn, if Little's story could only have ended here, before he started stealing helicopters and using them to rob banks ...

If the story of Little were fiction, I would discard it as another spaced-out author's attempt to depict "Rambo" playing the "crazed Vietnam vet." Sadly, and I mean by-God sadly, this story is not fiction.

Howard Swindle, the Pulitzer Prize-winning assistant managing editor of *The Dallas Morning News*, used in-depth interviews, a lot of head-banging research, and obvious compassion for his subject, to craft one great, kick-ass book, **ONCE A HERO** (Dell Publishing, 666 5th Ave., New York, NY 10103, \$4.95).

Some chapters in the book capture the substance and spirit of Army Aviation better than any other book I have ever read.

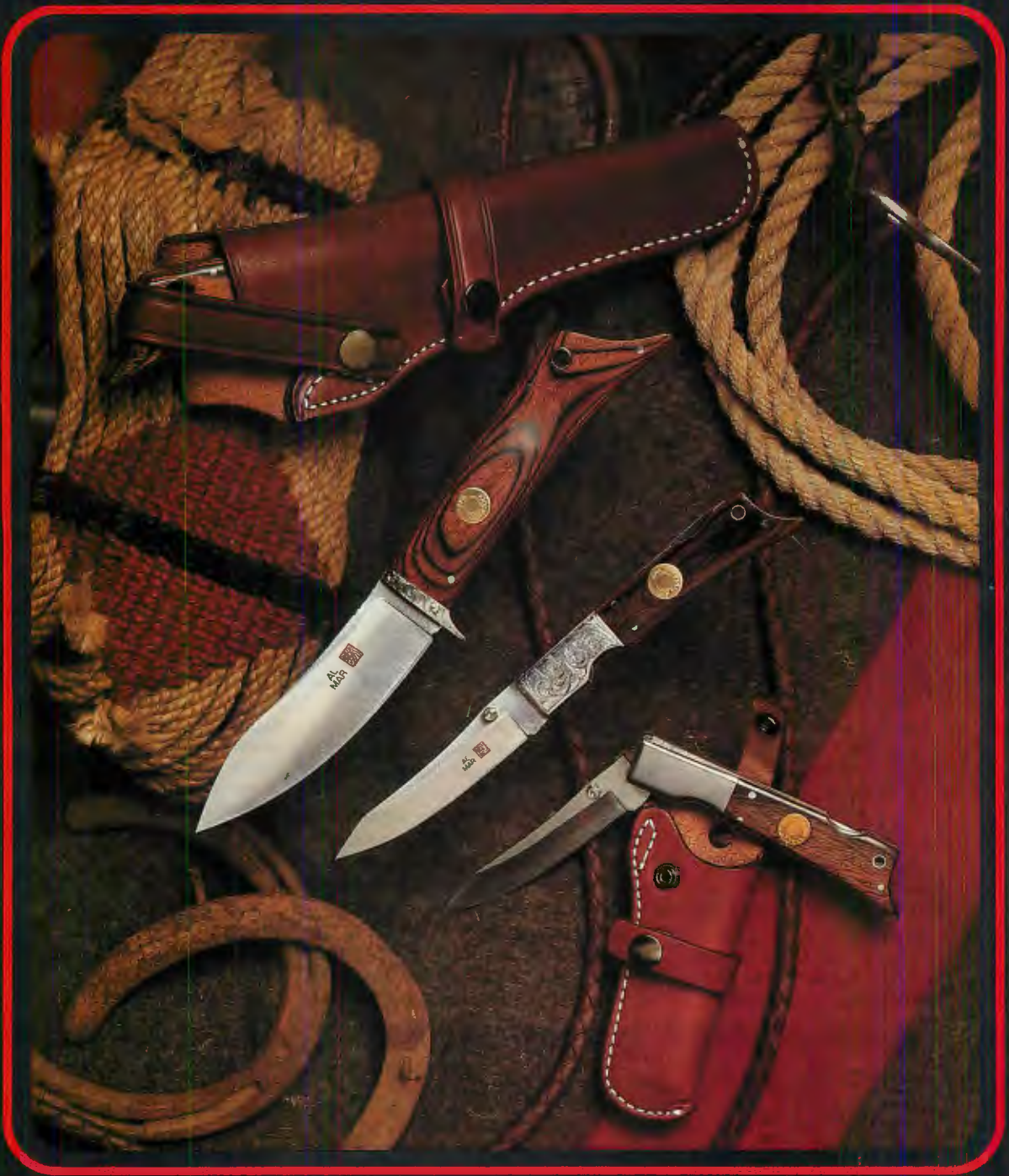
Swindle makes an honest, determined effort to explain Little's transformation from combat and police hero to convicted felon with heavy emphasis on post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) factors.

Little tore up his lawyer's motion for a PTSD defense, choosing instead to simply admit guilt and take his punishment. Only Little knows if Swindle's explanation is the truth, however, or even close to the truth.

If some movie or TV producers don't pick up the option on this book, they are missing out on a sure-fire winner. And, if **ONCE A HERO** doesn't motivate a whole bunch of people to demand a clemency proceeding for Little, there is something wrong with America.

— Review by Major James R. Kreutz, retired Master Army Aviator with two tours in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot. ✕

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COMBAT CRAFT

by Chuck Fremont

From Pond Scum to Perrier



GIs have a healthy suspicion of things the Army tells them to eat or drink. If you've ever eaten an MRE, you understand why.

Thus, there is a certain amount of distrust regarding military iodine water purification tablets. I've seen guys buy civilian chlorine-based water purification products because they didn't trust the GI tablets. At the other extreme, I've known guys who automatically add two iodine tablets to even clear water

to "make sure" it's purified.

It's time to dispel some myths about what it takes to make water safe to drink.

There are three basic means of purifying water in the field: heating, chemical disinfection and filtration. Effective purification requires removal or disinfection of disease-causing organisms, principally *Giardia lamblia* (both the protozoan and its cysts) and amoebas, bacteria and viruses. It's also desirable to remove suspended

Some portable water filters can disinfect water in field conditions without the need for iodine purification tablets, making them useful for long-term operations. But less expensive filters are not always effective against bacteria and viruses. Pictured from left to right, First Need, Mitsubishi/Arizona H2O, Timberline, Katadyn. Photo: Tom Slizewski

mineral sediment (i.e., dirt) and decaying organic matter (mostly plant debris) from drinking water.

Boiling is simple and effective in killing bacteria, viruses and parasites. In fact, *Giardia* and bacteria that cause intestinal problems are quite sensitive to heat: *Giardia* is killed within five minutes at 131 degrees Fahrenheit, and problem bacteria within one minute at 176 to 194 degrees Fahrenheit. A report from the American Medical Association concludes that any water brought to a boil, even at high elevations (the boiling temperature of water at 10,000 feet is 194 degrees Fahrenheit), is safe to drink.

But boiling is time consuming and requires considerable fuel. So chemi-

Boiling Temperatures of Water at Different Elevations

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10,000	3050	194	90
15,000	4575	185	75
20,000	7000	176*	80

(From *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*, 4th ed., Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1982.)

*Minimum temperature required to ensure safe water.

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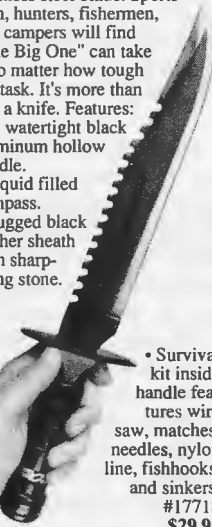
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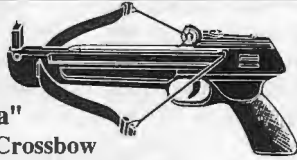
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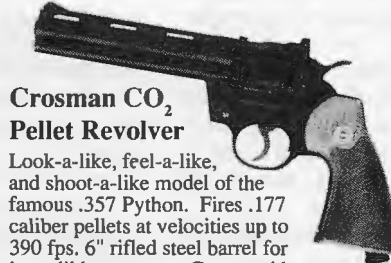
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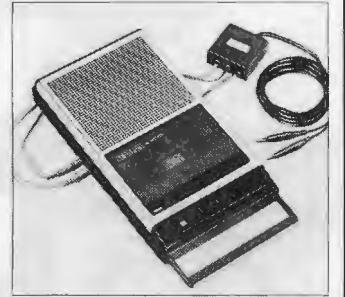


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cal disinfection and/or filtration are generally used by military forces to ensure safe water under field conditions.

Chlorine-based solutions should not be used for field water purification: the chlorine is rapidly neutralized by organic matter such as plant debris. Chlorine works OK for municipal supplies, which are filtered prior to treatment.

Iodine water purification tablets (GI tablets and civilian Potable Aqua) will destroy bacteria, viruses and parasites such as Giardia and associated cysts.

Heavily polluted water may require two tablets per liter or additional waiting time to be on the safe side. However, I recently tested heavily contaminated water for bacteria after adding just one GI iodine tablet per liter, and the water passed. (I don't recommend testing this on your buddy.)

The chemical reactions involving iodine slow down as water temperatures drop, so you should allow more time for the iodine to do its thing when disinfecting cold water: 15 to 30 minutes is usually recommended. Iodine tablets deteriorate on exposure to air, so you only want to open one bottle at a time. Opened bottles should be discarded after six months.

Tincture of iodine can also be used to disinfect water, but you need to be sure what sort of solution you're dealing with, since the actual amount of free (usable for disinfection) iodine can vary. You want to end up with a solution of 8mg per liter for normal disinfection; this is equivalent to one tablet per liter.

Some people are concerned over the use of iodine water disinfection tablets because of fear of iodine toxicity. In fact, there is little reason to be concerned about iodine poisoning from ingesting treated water: the amounts necessary to disinfect even heavily polluted water are far below levels affecting human health, at least in the short term.

However, many people find the taste of iodine objectionable, and long-term use (more than six months) in dosages used for field disinfection is not recommended. Also, you can always run out of the tablets.

For all of these reasons, portable water filters are growing in popularity. Filtration is generally effective at removing Giardia, sediment and plant debris. Better filters are supposed to remove bacteria and even nuclear fallout.

In tests run for the new magazine *Practical Survival*, I found both the Katydyn Pocket Filter and the First Need portable filter effective at removing bacteria as well as Giardia. The Katydyn has been used by special operations units deployed for long periods in remote areas, and this filter is approved by the General Services Administration (GSA) for military purchase.

Some precautions need to be taken with field filters. First, none are effective at removing viruses such as those causing Hepatitis A. In urban and

Chemical disinfection and/or filtration are generally used by military forces

high-risk areas, filtered water should still be chemically disinfected or boiled. A lower concentration (0.5mg/liter, or one tablet to 4 gallons of water, as opposed to the normal dose of one tablet per liter or quart) of iodine will be adequate if Giardia, amoebas and protozoan cysts are filtered out first.

On deployments to lesser developed countries for longer than two months, I would use a good filter system along with reduced dosages of iodine. To be on the safe side, use two tablets per filtered 5-gallon can; let it sit overnight. Katydyn makes a squad-sized filter that is handy for base camp situations and filtering larger quantities of water.

Trace amounts of water remaining in a filter or the attached mechanism may develop a high bacteria count. Some filters need to be disassembled, cleaned (by backwashing with a dilute chlorine or vinegar solution, per the manufacturer's instructions) and allowed to air dry between uses.

Expendable filter cartridges such as used in the First Need lose effectiveness with use, more rapidly with dirtier water, and may need to be replaced unexpectedly. Carry replacements if you plan on going long without resupply.

I recommend the Katydyn Pocket Filter. It's easily carried and uses a microporous ceramic filter cartridge treated with bacteriostatic silver for self-disinfection. This filter is field-maintainable and has a service life of up to 3,000 gallons. Retail cost is \$225. Weight is 1 lb. 7 oz. For more information, call 800-950-0808 or write Katydyn USA Inc., Dept. SOF, 3020 N. Scottsdale Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85251.

For a full review and technical analysis of leading portable water filters, see Chuck Fremont's article in the August-September issue of *Practical Survival Magazine*. Look for it at your local newsstand. ☒

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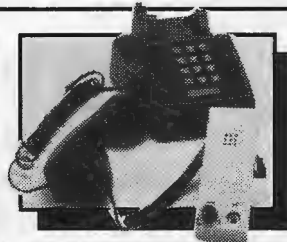
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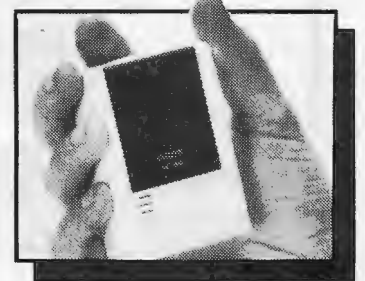


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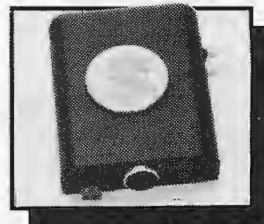
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SAS DARES IN THE GULF

BY SPIKE VAN PELT

THE two men were eating chicken and rice with their Kuwaiti counterparts in a restaurant thick with flies, and enjoying themselves immensely.

This was plush compared to the regimen of the British Special Air Service (SAS) commandos with whom they were secretly working. Eating something hot was a luxury by SAS standards, especially since they hadn't had to kill it first. The flies were normal; talking about what was going on was anything but.

The condition the men demanded in return for talking about clandestine operations a week before the ground invasion in the Gulf War was simple: no names. Besides, the reporter had offered them a telephone in the hotel to call home on, along with the use of a long, hot shower. Small paybacks.

One officer was a lieutenant commander in the Royal Marines, the other a major in the Royal Navy. Both were working as specially assigned intelligence officers under the guise of interrogators. They were lean, anxious men, mentally tough, and bright.

They were trained to survive and fight in any weather condition and terrain — arctic, jungle, wooded or desert. They could be shipped anywhere in the world within 24 hours to do what needed to be done.

This day they were in the Saudi frontier town of Hafar al Batin, 50km from the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border, while the SAS commandos they were connected with were operating in Iraq on two extremely important, but separate, clandestine operations. One operation was marking targets with laser beams for the smart bombs on allied fighter-bombers to home-in on, the other snatching Iraqi specialists for interrogation by the Coalition.

The officers described how the high-tech targeting operation by the SAS served as an important element of the precision-bombing campaign by the Coalition.

Small teams of the elite unit parachuted in at night or were helicoptered into Iraq just before and immediately after the start of the war, disappearing into the general

population around Baghdad and other large cities. Others lived in the desert, dressed in Bedouin garb, searching out mobile Scud launchers and military convoys.

Coordination was the key between the commandos on the ground, the AWACS planes above, and the fighter-bombers being dispatched. "The SAS has to be in touch with the people on the other side who are coordinating the attack. They [the SAS operators] use high-tech radio gear to scramble the signals used to relay instructions and avoid being picked up by the enemy," the major said.

Then the real work began. And it lasted 24 hours a day. Using hand-held laser devices, commandos identified, or "warmed," the military target so the fighter-bombers could pick up the signal and lock up the targets. Smart bombs did the rest.

"The SAS man fires his hand-held laser pistol at the target and "warms" it long enough for the bombs to be guided in," the lieutenant commander said. "Often, it requires the SAS man to be in a dangerous area near the target because the target may be obstructed."

Initially, most of the early bombing missions were aimed at the Iraqi military's command and control network, and the majority of those operations were located near Baghdad in areas with high civilian concentrations.

The operations generally worked this way: At a preset time, an AWACS plane or fighters carrying electronic homing equipment scanned an enemy area where the SAS operative was working. Once the SAS laser signal was located and followed to the point where it ended — the target — the coordinates of the location were given to Coalition fighter-bombers that were assigned to attack the target.

"And our guy gets the hell out of there before it happens," the major added.

The lieutenant commander would not say how many laser-aided bombing mis-



sions had been carried out by the SAS, although he indicated it was a large operation.

"The SAS is crawling all over Iraq doing very nasty things," he said. "They're dressed as Arabs, they speak as Arabs, and they look as Arabs. And they're doing what they've been trained to do — and very well."

In another secret operation, the SAS went deep behind enemy lines to kidnap Iraqi soldiers so allied intelligence could interrogate them, according to the major.

The officer said that during the operation the Coalition netted "at least 30 top secret documents detailing fire plans (showing how the Iraqis intended to use their weapons) and logistics capabilities," — exactly the kind of intelligence sought by Coalition forces prior to the ground assault into Kuwait and Iraq.

"We've been giving the SAS a nice little ... 'shopping list' of kinds of people we want, and three days later they come back with the ones we wanted," the major said.

"If we say we want an artilleryman," the major said, "they come back with an artilleryman. They just go in and snatch out a man who knows artillery, mine fields, engineering, or whatever. It's been highly successful. We just had an operation where the SAS went in and brought one guy out after killing all of his companions."

Such SAS operations, which also include hostage and prisoner rescues, are not viewed by military experts as unusual. Two months earlier an SAS squad went behind Iraqi lines and captured an enemy missile, bringing it back for analysis.

Just add it to the list of tricks the SAS can perform.

Spike Van Pelt, not his real name, was in the Kuwaiti theater of operations on assignment for a major U.S. daily newspaper. He filed this story on his return to the States. ✕

SHARP EDGE OF DESERT STORM

Text & Photos by Greg Walker



As the war against Iraq was joined on the ground by fast-moving air assault, airmobile and armored units, the knife industry back home was finding itself hard-pressed to provide the huge numbers of combat/utility knives suddenly in demand.

It seemed everyone wanted one of man's oldest weapons at his or her side, despite the fact that M16s, Berettas, and squad automatic weapons were everywhere.

"Back in November of 1990 the Marines were being told to expect heavy hand-to-hand combat," Linda Dawson of Dawson USA, a Colorado-based custom knife company, recalled. "By February we'd sent 20 combat swords to Saudi. The men wanted something they could behead Iraqi soldiers with when push came to shove." Dawson counts the Marine Corps as a steady client for their excellent hand-made combat knives, which includes a wicked Combat Tanto (Model # 07).

Al Mar Knives provided early critical support in helping to outfit six Special Forces A-teams from the rapidly deploying 5th Special Forces Group stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. These were the Green Berets heavily involved in training Ku-



Leatherman Tool

wait's Special Forces, and those who took part in ground operations during the liberation of Kuwait City in late February.

Al Mar's fixed-blade SERE series has always been extremely popular with Special Forces. This year the "Special Warfare" line replaced Al Mar's SERE as a natural evolution of the design.

Equally impressive, although not in production in time to see service in large numbers, was the "Combat Smatchet" from Colonel Rex Applegate/Al Mar. The first lot of 500 units made by Buck Knives in 1989 proved tremendously successful. It has since been improved with careful design refinements by Mr.

Mar and is now made in Japan. This is one of the finest close-combat knives you can get a handle on; it's too bad more didn't see service in Kuwait/Iraq.

Folders were commonplace among the troops, with Benchmade Knives' "Tactical Hunter" becoming available just as Desert Shield was announced. The first full-size front-locking folder to offer a Kraton grip insert, the Tactical Hunter offers Swedish razor-blade steel, Zytel handle slabs, and one of the surest locking systems seen in the last three years on a custom-quality production blade. Les De-

Asis, CEO of Benchmade, noted having sent a large number of these knives to Desert Storm APO and



Al Mar



Dawson USA

FPO addresses.

The "Walker-Thornton Combat Special" from custom maker Robert Rippy was sent to Private Francis Kielb of the 101st Airborne Division, a unit which provided one of the final blocking actions deep inside Iraq.

Hand-ground from ATS-34 stainless steel, the "Special" features a bowie pattern blade, gentle hollow-ground recurve edge, natural linen Micarta grips, and a precise Rockwell hardness of 59. Rippy, a combat veteran of both Korea and Vietnam, did not charge the young soldier, remembering what it was like to live on a private's pay but wanting the best equipment when his life depended on it.

Reports coming in to *Fighting Knives Magazine* from troops in the Persian Gulf, as well as those preparing to leave, centered predominantly on large, bowie-pattern battle blades. Kit Carson, a senior NCO whose MOS is armor-related, told editors at the magazine, "A tanker wants



Williams Fighter



Combat knives played an important part in the everyday life of the American soldier. Photo: Robert K. Brown



Benchmade

blades were far more prevalent due to near immediate access. Surplus

outlets and gun stores near Fort Bragg, North Carolina, saw their shelves swept clean by spec ops personnel and paratroopers when unit deployments became certain.

Custom makers with available models in the \$75 to \$350 range were the next sources contacted. Stainless and carbon steel knives saw the most requests; few Damascus patterns were sought after, due primarily to the high cost of quality Damascus blades.

A huge number of Ek "Warrior" models were sold, according to a company spokesperson. At \$80 per unit it wasn't hard to understand why, particularly with the reputation Ek has for superlative quality control and delivery.

Early feedback from the Persian Gulf seems to wash away preconceived notions concerning battle knives. Troops were little concerned with the weight factor, leaning toward "... the biggest damned knife I could get my hands on."

Multipurpose pocket knives such as Swiss army knives (all the large models), Leatherman Tools, and Al Mar's "4x4," received strong orders from overseas. Folders — specifically those with front/rear locking systems and synthetic handles — were equally sought after as "always with you" items of equipment.

Many times these were used for cutting commo wire, ripping open MRE packets, cutting cloth strips for field expedient blindfolds and gags, or just scraping built-up carbon from an M16 bolt face. The most common combination carried by the individual soldier was a sturdy pocket knife and medium to "heavy" fixed blade.



M30A1

One knife, issued to SEAL teams 3 and 5, didn't fare well, according to SEAL operators who had firsthand experience with the blade. The Phrobis Combat-Utility Knife, or C.U.K., demonstrated a propensity to break at mid-blade or internally at the tang.

This occurred so often that a supply officer for Team 3, speaking under the condition he not be identified, told me that no further orders for the Phrobis knife were coming from any West Coast team in the near future. "I've got one here on my desk," he lamented.

Continued on page 104

a big knife to do all manner of things. He'll be prying barbed wire out of his tracks, smashing in ammo crates, cutting camouflage netting and canvas. A tanker's knife "sheath" is a 65-ton vehicle; he ain't worried about size and weight factors."

Dual-purpose tools were popular as well. The best of the lot and most available came from Leatherman Tool, an Oregon-based firm. A pocket tool kit featuring 12 separate tools including a knife blade, the Leatherman Tool is invaluable to the combat soldier as he can fix, adjust, or improvise any number of things with it. Issued to SEALs and other selected special operations units, this may have been one of the most-used "combat" knives of the war.

Custom maker Bob Terzuola teamed up with Cutlery Shoppe and together they were able to equip a number of desert warriors with the "M30A1" combat knife. Based on one of Terzuola's most preferred designs, the M30A1 is manufactured from ATS-34 stainless steel and features a checkered no-slip Zytel handle.



Combat Smatchet

Jeff Loffer, CEO of Cutlery Shoppe, informed me his company had shipped hundreds of knives to the Persian Gulf, adding miniature American flags, candies, patches, and decals

to the boxes before they went out. "We wanted them to know we cared," Loffer said.

Another acknowledged master of the combat knife, John Salley, was in the process of finishing one of his "Williams Fighters" as I touched base with him. From a design given John by a Vietnam veteran whose knife was "lost" after he'd been wounded, the Williams Fighter is a practical handful of hand-ground steel which can be worn comfortably on either the battle harness or pants belt.

"The troops ordering knives from Persian Gulf APOs get priority attention," John remarked, as he finished packaging an out-going knife. Having worked with this knife myself, I have no doubt soldiers carrying a Salley blade were well-served by their choice.

These are but a small selection of the knives which took part in Desert Storm. Production



Walker-Thornton Combat Special

MARINES

FOR ALL

SEASONS

Text & Photos by Robert J. Caldwell

THE 1st and 2nd Marine divisions assaulted the "Saddam Line" in Kuwait with brilliant success.

Two additional Marine expeditionary forces — the equivalent of four brigades — remained afloat and ashore in the Persian Gulf pinning down half a dozen Iraqi divisions.

Saddam's soldiers were waiting for an amphibious assault on the Kuwaiti coast that would never come. And two Marine air wings contributed to the Coalition's devastatingly effective air war. In all, roughly three-quarters of the U.S. Marine Corps' combat strength was committed in the Gulf theater.

But suppose Iraq's army had turned out to be something stiffer than a cheese soufflé. Would the Marines, especially the ground forces, have had the right tools for the job? Were Marine ground divisions suited for use as infantry in a conventional desert war? And, in the event of heavy casualties, did the Marine Corps have the right doctrine for replacing its losses?

Notwithstanding the stunning success of Desert Storm, these are questions someone in the Pentagon should be asking.

Traditionally, the Marine Corps' mission has been amphibious assault — storming hostile beaches and seizing real estate that its parent service, the U.S. Navy, can use for forward bases. But in Korea and Vietnam, the Marines fought mostly as elite infantry. In Vietnam especially, some thought the Marines had been miscast, although their valor and accomplishments were never questioned.

But at least the ground wars in Korea and Vietnam were primarily infantry affairs, and often light infantry at that. And Marines have always been superb light infantrymen.

But a decade ago, when the Marine Corps became a major component of the Pentagon's Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), since renamed Central Command, the ground rules shifted markedly. The Marines were confronted with the prospect of fighting heavy conventional forces — Soviets or Iranians in the early 1980s,

Iraqis in the 1990s — in a desert environment.

That is when the 932-square-mile base at Twentynine Palms, and the Army's 1,000-square-mile National Training Center (NTC), 60 miles to the northeast in California's Mojave Desert, became doubly useful. Both facilities permitted large training exercises involving combined arms and live-fire in desert terrain not unlike what U.S. forces would encounter in the Persian Gulf.

"No one can assume that Central Command won't have to fight in the desert again against well-equipped conventional forces during the 1990s."

The Army's tank and heavy mechanized infantry units were ideally suited to desert warfare, and were the chief beneficiaries of the NTC's training regimen. They combined speed with firepower, traditionally the two paramount essentials in desert warfare.

But a decade after the Marines became a vital component of RDF-Central Command, the Corps' table of organization and equipment remains a doctrinal hybrid. Marine divisions in Desert Storm were too heavy to serve as light infantry and too light to fight properly as heavy tank or mechanized forces.

For example, Desert Storm's Marines lacked a proper infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) or even an appropriate armored personnel carrier (APC). Marine tanks, M60A1s, were more than good enough against the befuddled Iraqis, but far less capable than the Army's M1A1s. The Marines received a few M1A1s in Saudi Arabia last January, but most Marine tank battalions involved in Desert Storm had to make do with the 1960s-era M60A1.

The Marines' lack of an IFV or APC is

more serious. Desert warfare requires, above all, speed of maneuver and heavy shock at the point of attack. That means infantry must keep up with fast-moving tanks. Both must maneuver and attack together.

The Marines have two armored vehicle types that might seem sufficient to enable the grunts to keep pace with the tanks. But, in fact, neither vehicle suffices.

The landing vehicle tracked personnel-7 (LVTP-7) is, as its name implies, primarily an amphibious assault vehicle. Out of the water, it is large and clumsy. It even looks inappropriate — more like a beached whale than an IFV. Its height of nearly 11 feet and its relatively thin armor make it a vulnerable target. And it lacks firepower. Most LVTP-7s have only a turret-mounted .50 cal. machine gun.

The Marines also have the light armored vehicle (LAV), which they began procuring in 1983 to meet an RDF requirement. The LAV is a fast, lightly armored, eight-wheeled vehicle. It can carry six fully-armed Marines in addition to the three-man crew. It can be fitted with a 25mm chain gun, TOW antitank missiles or an 81mm mortar. There are also cargo, maintenance and recovery, and command and control versions.

Built by General Motors of Canada, the LAV is a quality vehicle with numerous uses. But it is neither an adequate IFV nor a proper APC. Its cross-country mobility is limited and its armor is too thin to withstand anything more than 7.62mm small arms fire. The Marines know the limitations of the LAV, and use it mostly as a reconnaissance vehicle or in a fire-support role.

So, had the Marines been forced to fight a war of maneuver against heavy armored or mechanized Iraqi units, Marine infantry trying to keep up with tanks would have been stuck with the cumbersome LVTP-7s or even open trucks and Humvees. Fortunately, Saddam Hussein's surrender-prone infantry and dazed, outclassed armored units gave the Marines little trouble. It could be far tougher the next time the



Assaulting trench line during training exercise at Twentynine Palms. Could lightly equipped Marines out-fight well-trained and motivated mech units?

Marines have to fight.

It's also worth noting that the principal Marine artillery piece, the 155mm M198, is towed, not self-propelled. The Marines used their M198s effectively on shoot-and-scoot missions against the Iraqis. But mobile forces fighting a modern war of maneuver need armored self-propelled artillery, both to protect gun crews and to keep up with tanks and mechanized infantry.

Casualty Replacement

With the anticipated ground war in the Gulf looming last February, the Air-Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms was busy building and training replacement companies for the casualties everyone expected in Desert Storm. The

Marines in NBC gear double-time through obstacle course at Twentynine Palms, California.



Marines activated a new command, the Southwest Asia Training Group (SWATG) for this purpose.

Just days before Desert Storm's 100-hour blitzkrieg began, I watched as SWATG put one of its replacement companies through a live-fire, barrier-breaching assault exercise at Range III. It was strictly a ground-pounder exercise with the Marines crawling through barbed wire, clearing trenches, and firing at bunkers down range.

The CS (riot control) gas usually used here to simulate Iraqi chemical warfare was suspended in deference to visiting journalists. But the Marines had to don protective masks and double-time back through the assault course as part of their familiarization training.

The Marines' exercises were in stark contrast to the armored and mechanized infantry assaults the Army was teaching its Desert Storm backups at the NTC.

The Marines' replacement companies were to be shipped to Saudi Arabia, then broken up to supply individual replacements as needed by Marine units at the front.

As it happened, of course, few replacements were needed. Desert Storm's Marines accomplished their mission with miraculously few casualties. But had the Iraqis proved tougher and Marine casualties substantial, they might have discovered anew that the individual replacement system has serious drawbacks.



Marines' light armored vehicle (LAV) on display. Is it an infantry fighting vehicle, armored personnel carrier or armored truck?

During World War II, the U.S. Army sought to keep its rifle companies and battalions up to strength and combat effective by feeding a constant supply of individual replacements to depleted units. The system kept units up to strength, on paper, but over time it degraded their combat effectiveness.

Combat Cohesion

In sustained combat, and particularly infantry combat, cohesion is essential to a unit's effectiveness. A unit of strangers inevitably lacks cohesion.

The Germans, who had to cope with catastrophic casualties during World War II, sought to maximize unit cohesion by

Continued on page 92



“**A**NOTHER day in paradise, eh, *Guapo*?” Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent Larry A. Leveron, team leader for Operation Snowcap, the DEA’s counternarcotics campaign in Trinidad, Bolivia, was talking to a U.S. Coast Guard adviser. He used the Spanish nickname for “brave and handsome” that the *gringos* in Trinidad often use.

The Coast Guardsman didn’t bother to answer. Other Coast Guardsmen, DEA agents and members of the U.S. Border Patrol busied themselves with last-minute preparations for the dawn helicopter raid, guzzling coffee and filling canteens from a

water purifier on the hotel balcony.

In the suite next door, two rooms stuffed with classified radio equipment and a mainframe computer hooked to a satellite dish on the hotel roof, U.S. Special Forces communications specialists from Ft. Bragg made last-minute radio checks on the weather.


February is the end of the rainy season in eastern Bolivia, and the Bolivian pilots flying the nine UH-1H helicopters for today’s mission were nervous about flying in foul weather. A planned drop-off of two Zodiac raft teams the previous night, so the teams could slip up the Estancia Melindri in the dark and block escape routes on the Rio Yacuma, was scrubbed at the last minute because of heavy rains. But today looked good, the Green Beret radio operator said.

With good wishes from three U.S. Navy

SEAL advisers, who grumbled good naturedly because rules of engagement prohibit them or the Green Berets from going on Snowcap operations, the two dozen camouflaged *gringos* grabbed up their gear and gunbags. They walked past the armed Bolivian guards and through the iron gates that mark two of the hotel’s top floors as off limits to the public and headed down the stairs.

On the median that divides the street in front of the hotel, well-dressed Bolivians and Colombians, black market money-changers with fat rolls of crisp, new \$100 greenbacks, watched intently as the U.S. advisers loaded their gear and jammed into civilian four-wheel drive vehicles. The *gringos* assume these men also serve as eyes and ears for the narcotraffickers.

At the Trinidad airport, about 40 members of Bolivia’s Rural Mobile Patrol Unit



DEATH TO THE TYRANT COCAINE

**U.S. Drug Commandos Go
to the Source in Bolivia**

Text & Photos by James L. Pate

UMOPAR and Informant take off to search nearby jungle for a cocaine lab.



ABOVE LEFT: Coca leaves for sale on La Paz street. Increased operational tempo of Operation Snowcap has driven price of 100 pounds of leaves to well below \$30, the price a farmer must get to break even.

ABOVE RIGHT: *Campeño* hiding in jungle near Estancia Melindri is brought back to ranch for questioning after being discovered by UMOPAR and U.S. advisers.



Led by an informant, U.S. advisers and UMOPAR look for suspected lab site.

(UMOPAR), a counternarcotics battalion of the National Police, waited on the tarmac. A prosecutor from the Justice Ministry, search warrants for the Melindri ranch stuffed in the pocket of his camouflage fatigues, puffed on a cigarette and looked at his watch.

A hundred yards away, a small knot of people at the Lloyd Aero Boliviano airlines office watched the assemblage load. The whole town knew something was up. Only three helicopters are usually stationed at Trinidad, but two days earlier, six others from UMOPAR bases in Chimore and Santa Cruz, had flown in to take part in the massive operation being planned for the past two weeks by the U.S. Embassy.

"They gotta know we're coming," said one of the U.S. advisers, watching the two groups watch them. Trinidad, capital of the Kansas-sized Beni Department, is an isolated city of about 25,000 in the Amazon Basin, where the only real means of transportation is by air or water. It is almost impossible for any large group to leave undetected.

The nine Hueys lifted off just after dawn, heading north toward the Brazilian border, where the triple-canopy jungles of the Amazon begin. Minutes later, a Spanish-built CASA 212, a small twin-engine STOL (short takeoff and landing) version of the C-130 owned and flown by the DEA followed. It is an ideal aircraft for hauling small loads in and out of the thousands of dirt strips that dot the vast expanse of savannas, ranches and jungles of Bolivia's

Beni and Pando Departments.

We reached the Estancia Melindri in just under an hour. Intelligence coordinated by a newly organized operations planning group at the U.S. Embassy in La Paz indicated the presence of two cocaine labs in the nearby jungle —and of 35-40 heavily armed men. So the helicopters landed first, setting up a security perimeter and checking the short dirt airstrip to make sure it would support the CASA.

Inside the CASA, I sat next to Bill, a Coast Guard adviser. He was a boating instructor from the service's special operations unit known as the Drug Interdiction Assist Team, or DIAT, formed in 1988 to participate in Operation Snowcap. Also in the CASA were 12 members of UMOPAR and two deflated Zodiac rafts.

The DEA pilots set the CASA down easily, reversed engines hard and stood on the brakes. We stopped less than 30 yards from a barbed wire fence. Bill and his two boat teams grabbed their gear, including two hefty, 45hp Evinrude engines, and piled out.

Up at the ranch complex, a neat, newly constructed brick bunkhouse surrounded by a kitchen and a couple of storage buildings, the Justice Ministry prosecutor was executing the search warrant, assisted by UMOPAR. The two raft teams inflated their Zodiacs and headed across a lake to a strip of thick jungle that separated the ranch from the Rio Yacuma. Two informants had said that was where the labs were located.

If any heavily armed security force had been at the ranch, it had fled. There was

only a family with three children, and an old man who said he'd never heard of the Nacife family, a wealthy clan from nearby Santa Ana who owned the ranch and was allegedly involved in drug-trafficking.

A Remington Model 66 Nylon .22-caliber rifle and a rusty .30-30 carbine were found in a room with a single sideband radio valued at \$3,000-\$4,000. The junked remains of a single-engine Cessna sat in the yard. Enough slaughtered beef to feed 20 or 30 people for two weeks was found in a shed near the stock pens, which contained only a few cattle.

No, the old man said, they were the only ones who lived there.

The air above the ranch was soon criss-crossed by private aircraft from Santa Ana, a nearby town of about 20,000 which is known as "the Medellin of Bolivia." So pervasive is the drug-induced corruption in Santa Ana that even the Navy detachment on the Rio Yacuma has been known to fire on Bolivian government helicopters during drug raids.

"Looks like we've got 'em worried," Chris, a former San Francisco attorney and martial artist who gave up his law career to become a DEA agent, said. He has seen Operation Snowcap grow from the days when agents lived in tents in a muddy compound outside Trinidad, with very little logistical support, to today's permanent compound being built to supplant the temporary headquarters in the hotel where the Trinidad Snowcap detachment has

The citizenry had attacked Snowcappers with machetes and guns three times in the past.

been billeted for about two years.

A small security detachment was sent down a road leading to Santa Ana to set up a checkpoint to make sure armed citizens from Santa Ana did not surprise the Operation Snowcap force at the ranch. The citizenry had attacked Snowcappers with machetes and guns three times in the past.

The Zodiacs soon returned with two captives, men they found hiding in the jungle. They were blindfolded and questioned, but said they knew nothing of any labs. One finally admitted he knew where a lab *might* be. He led the men from UMOPAR and the DEA agents to a site where a lab apparently had been disassembled and moved.

After hours of more fruitless searching, the raiding party finally loaded up their gear and took off. The DEA pilots backed the CASA up to the fence at one end of the runway, revved the two engines to what felt like full throttle with the brakes on, and we shot down the bumpy runway. Gazing out the rear cargo door, Bill and I stared at each other wide-eyed just after lift-off, when another fence zoomed just beneath. We apparently cleared it by only

That night, a helicopter inserted two Zodiac teams upriver from Estancia Melindri and approached from the Rio Yacuma, this time with success. They found a small lab, a generator, a device for recycling chemicals and about 30 kilograms of cocaine. The recycler was blown up, the generator and the cocaine confiscated. No arrests were made because everyone fled into the jungle. One of the lab personnel, apparently a woman, left in a hurry, leaving her white shoes behind.

Drug Dealer Early Warning System

Back in Trinidad, all agreed that the *narcotraficantes* apparently knew of the raid in advance. This is nothing new. With an extensive intelligence network of their own, supported by bribery and intimidation, they are almost never caught at the lab sites, usually fleeing minutes — sometimes hours — before UMOPAR and the American advisers arrive.

“It’s been slow lately,” Leveron acknowledged. He helped raid 17 labs in a 35-day period during his first 90-day assignment to Operation Snowcap in Bolivia in the spring of 1989. This

International Narcotics Matters, said.

Hinson, a civilian adviser to the riverine program in Vietnam, said, “The target of narcotics programs in Bolivia ... is to ‘de-develop’ the agricultural industry that is producing cocaine.”

Off Balance And On the Move

Raids such as the one of Estancia Melindri keep the traffickers off balance and on the move. Gone are the days when dopers could go just a short way out of a town or village and set up a lab under a tarpaulin. Labs now are set up out of helicopter range from Trinidad and are well-camouflaged.

“There are still sophisticated labs in Colombia ... but more and more, they are moving to more portable, more expendable labs, trying to adapt to what we are doing,” according to Donald F. Ferrarone, the top DEA agent in Bolivia.

Counternarcotics strategy focuses on three areas: the Beni, Pando and Santa Cruz Departments, collectively about the size of Texas, where most of the labs in Bolivia are located; the Chapare, a hilly region in the Cochabamba Department, about 100 miles or so south of Trinidad; and what Ferrarone described as “corporate headquarters,” the towns of Santa Ana and Santa Cruz.

Corporate headquarters are where traffickers live and have their support systems, their communications, their lawyers, their bankers and their pilots.

“Most major traffickers have homes in one or the other or both,” Ferrarone said.

Prior to Ferrarone’s assignment to Bolivia almost two years ago, interdiction activities in Bolivia were focused on the bottom rung of the cocaine production process, destroying the coca maceration pits where coca leaves are stomped and chemically transformed into coca paste.

An August 1990 report by the House Committee on Government Operations pointed out that the problem with this approach was that “it primarily affected large numbers of subsistence farmers, while least affecting the less numerous but more powerful and important narcotics traffickers.

Coke or Coke Classic?

“In effect, where no insurgent threat was previously present, these types of interdiction efforts were helping to create some of the conditions that could lead to future insurgent activities.”

Ferrarone said he and U.S. Ambassador Robert Gelbard decided that the proper target was “that part of the Bolivian drug chain at the point at which we first see the hand of the drug trafficking professional — the wholesale paste buyer.”

There are roughly 100 such paste buyers



Suspected lab worker is questioned after being found hiding in the jungle during a raid on a ranch near Santa Ana.

4 or 5 feet.

The DEA pilots have my respect and admiration, but I’ll have to think before they have my business as a passenger again.

The next day a follow-up helicopter reconnaissance was made. Intelligence was pretty specific about two labs at the ranch, and the DEA agents were chagrined they had not been able to find it. Flying over another ranch between Melindri and Santa Ana, the agents were amused when a dozen or so men began piling out of doors and windows, one man sprinting for an airplane hangar in his underwear, when the Bolivian helicopter flew over.

included a seizure of 623 kilos of cocaine outside Trinidad, the largest cocaine bust in Bolivia’s history.

Successful lab raids are far fewer now, but DEA and State Department personnel at the embassy in La Paz say this is not necessarily a sign of failure.

“If people who hear the word interdiction think that we are trying to stop Bolivian cocaine from reaching the United States by physically seizing the drug ... then they’re wrong. If that was what we were trying to do, we’d be doomed to failure,” Sherman Hinson, acting director of the Narcotic Affairs Section in Bolivia, part of the State Department’s Office of

CORRUPT HISTORY

Bolivia has long been a favorite refuge of men dodging the law, due in large part to its rugged, largely unconquered terrain and its history of weak political and military institutions. Wild West robbers Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, failed leftist revolutionary Che Guevara and Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie all chose it as a haven —albeit unwisely.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Bolivia, South America's poorest and most remote country, became economically hooked on cocaine. One-third of the world's coca is grown there. Increasingly, cocaine cartels found it more profitable to move closer to the coca leaves that labs turn into a sparkling white crystalline powder worth four times its weight in gold by the time it's snorted up North American noses.

In the 1980s a series of coups and human rights abuses under a government in league with drug traffickers brought Bolivia to the brink of disaster. Drug traffickers operated at unprecedented levels, with virtually no restrictions. The nation's trade balance tipped wildly out of kilter as capital hemorrhaged from the country in the underground, drug-based economy, leading to a hyperinflation rate of 24,000% annually.

Long-suffering Bolivians finally reacted. Former rival political parties —the moderate Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) —formed a coalition and instituted drastic (some critics say Draconian) economic measures to regain control.

President Paz Zamora, elected president in 1989, has continued the programs established by his predecessors. He has also increasingly cooperated with the United States in cracking down on drug trafficking, commensurate with large increases in U.S. financial aid to Bolivia —\$158 million in 1991, as compared to \$44 million in 1988.

Bolivia is just one part of a widespread transformation of South America in the last decade — a remarkable move away from military dictatorships and toward democratic governments. In 1979 only five of South America's 13 nations had civilian-controlled governments. One of those five, Suriname, is now the continent's only country governed by its military.

At this point, the single biggest obstacle to success against the drug traffickers is Bolivia's legendary corruption. In a poor country where corruption is widely accepted as standard practice, the large amounts of money offered by drug traffickers are almost impossible for Bolivian officials to refuse.

One of the best examples of the extent of corruption in the Bolivian government occurred on 22 June 1989, when U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents and the Bolivian

National Police's Rural Mobile Patrol Unit (UMOPAR) troops raided the small town of Santa Ana de Yacume.

Santa Ana, a town with a population of only 20,000 in a remote part of Beni Department, where many of the drug processing labs are hidden, has three modern airports and neighborhoods of large homes with armed guards and high walls.

When the raiding party, which included nine UH-1H helicopters donated by the U.S. government, arrived in Santa Ana to arrest a major Bolivian drug trafficker, townspeople immediately surrounded the raiding party. Apparently forewarned of the raid, the townspeople were armed and gunshots began to fly when five people were arrested and moved to the helo landing zone outside the town.

Four people were shot to death before takeoff. Adding insult to injury, two of the helicopters were hit by small arms fire from the Bolivian navy detachment on the Yacuma River just outside Santa Ana. The detachment apparently had been paid off by drug traffickers.

The Bolivian navy has also been accused of transporting drugs and supplies for the traffickers, and of more benign corruption as well. A State Department memo reported that the Bolivian navy has used the eight 22-foot Piranha gunboats bought by the State Department for Bolivia at \$86,750 each "as river taxis to earn money when DEA agents were not aboard." Other troubling allegations include a report that the former commander of all UMOPAR forces in the Chapare region (where most of the illicit coca is grown) allowed his girlfriend, the sister of a well-known narcotics trafficker, free access to the Chimore command post, location of the UMOPAR training facility and the base used by U.S. Special Forces and DEA personnel.

Another female, a cook, who regularly prepared meals for Green Beret trainers, was arrested last year by the Bolivians after she was found with line drawings of all the *gringo* barracks. A subsequent search of her house also turned up photographs of the Special Forces commander and the deputy-chief-of-mission at the embassy in La Paz.

Top DEA agent Donald F. Ferrarone told me, "Corruption needs to be a U.S. policy issue here. In Vietnam, we chose to ignore it. We don't choose to ignore it here ... We're hoping over a five- or, more realistically, a 10-year period, to have their institutions strong enough to withstand the corruption onslaught."

— J.P.



operating in Bolivia, loosely organized in a co-op arrangement. While coca leaves are legal in Bolivia, part of the traditional culture used for at least 2,000 years to stem fatigue and hunger, the paste and other byproducts are illegal.

"We found that we were able to measure success of an operation when we heard the 'Coca-Cola' buyer had moved in to buy all the leaf because ... the prices had dropped so low," Ferrarone said. "The buyer quickly came in and bought all the coca leaf he could get his hands on."

Coca has always been an ingredient in the popular soft drink, although the coca used in the production of Coca-Cola has its narcotic alkaloids neutralized.

Under constant prodding by the United

States, Bolivia's congress passed a law in 1988 that for the first time regulated the growth of coca, limiting it to certain areas, outlawing it in others, and outlining a plan for its reduction to a level that would meet the needs of local consumption and legitimate export, such as medicinal cocaine hydrochloride and the deactivated alkaloids used in Coca-Cola.

Under the law, all coca fields must be registered, including those in the Yungas, a mountainous region north of La Paz, where most of the coca for domestic consumption is grown. In the Chapare, farmers are paid up to \$2,000 per hectare (about 2.4 acres), in part subsidized by Uncle Sam, to plow under their coca plants.

The program met with only marginal success until 1990, when for the first time, Bolivia ended the year with less coca under cultivation than at the beginning of the year, from 63,500 hectares down to 61,500 hectares.

In the Chapare, where the average farmer cultivates one to two hectares of coca, it is increasingly more advantageous to plow under the coca rather than sell it to the traffickers, whose demand has dropped because of constant pressure from UMOPAR raiding teams like the one at Trinidad.

For example, the annual per capita income in Bolivia is about \$650, or about 2,210 Bolivian pesos. A coca farmer who signs up for the government's eradication

“We found that we were able to measure success of an operation when we heard the ‘Coca-Cola’ buyer had moved in to buy all the leaf because ... the prices had dropped so low.”

program receives three times that amount — about 6,800 pesos — for each hectare of coca plowed under.

At the same time, the price paid by traffickers for 100 pounds of dried coca leaves, which cost the farmer about \$30 to grow, has dropped from \$89 in August 1989 to less than \$10 in April 1990 to about \$15 in March 1991.

“Counternarcotics law enforcement drives down the price of the leaf by reducing demand because the traffickers can’t sit still long enough to set up their labs for any appreciable length of time. They know UMOPAR and DEA are out there beating the bushes looking for them,” Hinson told me.

Farmers participating in the eradication program are also eligible for credit assistance from the U.S. State Department’s Agency for International Development for alternative crop assistance and free instruction from the Agriculture Department’s Extension Service. Thus, said Hinson, some former coca farmers in the Chapare have begun growing and marketing pineapples in Argentina and bananas in Bolivia.

“There is no single magic solution to this,” Hinson said. “We can’t make the cocaine problem in Bolivia go away by controlling it purely in Bolivia, nor can we make the cocaine problem in the United States go away purely by controlling it in the United States.”

People Live in Fear

Trinidad’s only newspaper, *Carta Beniense Informativa*, complained in an editorial published 24 February, “The responsibility for drug trafficking should be put where it belongs, with the millions of North American consumers.”

The newspaper claimed Beni’s residents “live in a virtual state of war” because of the UMOPAR’s recently increased operational tempo. Such heliborne and riverine operations are “oppressing the entire community, creating a stigma,” the editorial said. “Even though the community has cooperated, it is becoming more difficult because people live in fear and have their rights violated.”

The same edition of the paper quoted Commandante Morales Murillo, head of the Bolivian army’s 6th Division, headquartered in Trinidad, as saying he would solve the situation by taking command of all UMOPAR-DEA operations. In a meeting with DEA and UMOPAR officers two days later, however, he backed down, claiming he had been misquoted.

Yet it illustrates the constant problems Operation Snowcap personnel run into. And not all the problems come from the traffickers and the citizens. Sometimes they come from people DEA works with directly. For example, last year a truck delivered by the Bolivian air force to the DEA detachment at Chimore rolled on to the tarmac on bald tires.

Also, although the plane’s body was brand new, somewhere between La Paz and Chimore somebody had removed the new engine and dropped in an old, worn out engine, and had replaced the radio and



Two members of UMOPAR watch for boat traffic approaching Santa Ana, a town in Beni Department controlled by drug traffickers, while their compatriots search ranch owned by well-known trafficking family.

other dashboard instrumentation with worn-out parts.

It was just one more of the many daily headaches that fall on Leveron’s shoulders, from the complex issues of planning extended operations to squabbles about room assignments among his own personnel, to the bureaucratic red tape with Bolivians.

More often than not, Leveron smiles and mutters his stock phrase, one that invokes the patience necessary for getting along in Bolivia: “Like a pig in a python, this, too, shall pass.”

He had followed up the initial raid on Estancia Melindri, and the lab bust the next day, with a three-day raft reconnaissance that ended within sight of the Santa Ana naval base that two years ago fired on UMOPAR helicopters.

“Our informants tell us we’ve got the narcos in Santa Ana scared, afraid that we’re going to drop right in the middle of town again,” he said, smiling and obviously relishing the thought. “For us, that’s good information, because their mental attitude can make all the difference in the world.”

Leveron and one other DEA adviser, along with two Coast Guard DIAT team members, 12 UMOPAR troops and one reporter (me), were dropped off by helicopter at a remote, abandoned ranch with three Zodiac rafts.

The rafts were deployed at dark and we spent the next two nights listening for lab generators, looking for lights, and monitoring traffic on the Rio Yacuma as we drifted closer and closer to Santa Ana. As daylight approached, we would hide the rafts, string up our hammocks, and lay low again until dark.

On the second day, a woodcutter was surprised when he stumbled into our camp after tying up his dugout canoe. Acknowledging he was from Santa Ana, he said he knew there were many narcotraficantes there.

“Everyone there knows who they are because it’s a small town,” he said. “Probably half the people there are involved in drugs. I’m poor. I don’t have anything for myself, but I don’t have anything to do with them. When we work in the woods sometimes, they come out and chase us away. It makes it difficult to make an honest living, but they threaten us if we don’t leave. My mother told me to stay away from them because she is afraid of them.”

The woodcutter had little useful information, except that he confirmed what we’d already heard, that the Estancia Melindri was owned by the Nacife family, something the caretaker had denied. After asking him questions about landmarks up the river — hopefully leading him to think we were headed in that direction — we gave him some food for his family and about 40 Bolivian pesos, after which he left with his load of wood.

We found two sites the next day where labs were under construction, and revisited the lab site that had been raided four days earlier. Most of the burned and damaged processing equipment had been hauled away, presumably in hopes of salvage. The chemical recycler is an increasingly important piece of equipment to the traffickers, because constant vessel searches along the major rivers are making

Continued on page 104



PFLP night fighting patrol sets off for assault on Israeli unit. Cameraman Yates is second from left.



WE had been holed up in the Bekaa Valley base of some "Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine" (PFLP) commandos, waiting to film them on an operation.

If you hang out in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, you'll bump into every Middle East guerrilla or terrorist organization you can think of, and a few more besides — some of which are liable to snatch you as a hostage. The Bekaa is the Belly of the Beast.

After lengthy negotiations the PFLP had agreed to allow a U.S. TV news team to

Text & Photos by Peter Douglas

KEYSTONE OMMANDOS

SOF on
Patrol With
Palestinian
Glory
Seekers



accompany one of their units on an operation. The TV network hired freelance cameraman Mervyn Yates, a legend within the TV news industry with a reputation for accepting hazardous assignments. Yates, who had a splendid handlebar moustache, was universally known among various Middle East factions as "The Moustache."

I had met Yates in 1982 in Beirut. We were both ex-Royal Marines and hoped to team up some day. This assignment seemed the right time to do so. Twenty-four hours after his call I was in Syria and, shortly after that, in the PFLP Bekaa Valley hideaway.

Here, for reasons of operational secu-

rity, we were kept out of sight and denied access to phones. The house was small and nondescript, tucked in the outer suburbs of Chataura, itself little more than a collection of neglected buildings with corrugated iron roofs, which rattled loudly when cold autumnal winds whistled through the valley.

We shared our damp room with the "dead patrol," a poster of passport-sized photographs of PFLP members killed in action. Their eyes seemed to follow us around the room in a most unnerving manner. We hoped the patrol we were to accompany would be more fortunate than they had been.

Conversation with our hosts was limited

to wide smiles and nodding acceptance of the steaming cups of bitter Arabic coffee which arrived every few hours. As our companions were very young, we assumed they were rear-echelon personnel. Each day the English-speaking base commander, Commander Abu, dropped by to check if we needed anything. The only thing we needed, precise information about the operation, he could not supply.

Back Seat Barbecue

On the third day Commander Abu made an early appearance and announced that we would move immediately. We piled into a battered white Mercedes and our young guardians, bristling with an

assortment of weapons, bundled in beside us. Their desire to ensure our safety was commendable, but their cavalier attitude to weapon safety gave us cause for concern.

One young warrior peered down the iron sights of a rocket-propelled grenade launcher (RPG), its barrel and attached rocket jutting out of the car window, the flared rear end only a few inches from our faces. The consequences for us had he fired — instant back seat barbecue — were too appalling to contemplate.

For about an hour we hurtled along the rutted surface of the main road, weaving between the traffic with much horn-honking, shouting and Kalashnikov-waving out of the windows. Low profile was not the order of the day. Turning down a slip-road, we pulled up inside a walled compound with a squat two-story house in one corner.

There were more PFLP men here, all (thankfully) older than our companions.

There was also an air of expectant excitement as men milled around the compound cleaning weapons and oiling great belts of 7.62mm ammunition.

Our original companions were more boisterous than usual, leaping about with their Kalashnikovs in theatrical mock battle with imaginary foes. We prepared our equipment, drank more bitter Arabic coffee, and waited for the usual midday disappointment that passed for lunch.

With a weather forecast for total cloud cover and rain, Commander Abu confirmed that we were to accompany a 20-man, night-fighting patrol setting off that night to locate an Israeli unit. The PFLP patrol would inflict what damage it could and then withdraw from contact. We would be assigned a six-man security section and an interpreter. It sounded heavy duty and gave us grounds for serious thought. Not without misgivings, Yates and I agreed to go ahead.

Commander Abu announced that lunch had been canceled as we must leave right away. That said, he and most of the PFLP disappeared to attend to various "last-minute" errands. Two hungry hours later, they returned in a fleet of six jeeps, some with 12.7mm heavy machine guns (HMGs) mounted on the back but, to our immense disappointment, no lunch.

Concealing our disappointment, we clambered aboard a jeep and set off in convoy. The drivers took the opportunity to live out their rally driver fantasies and raced to overtake each other on the twisting road. After half an hour, in case no one had noticed we had left the "safe house," we pulled up outside a kebab shop and several heavily armed PFLP went in to order 30 kebabs to go. (I never did find out

if they had to pay.)

The kebabs were soon powdered with a layer of grit and sand, thrown up in billowing clouds as we bounced along back roads cut deep between fields. Suddenly we halted so abruptly I thought we had hit something. We had: the jeep in front! Those behind only avoided a multiple pile-up by swerving into plowed fields on either side. It took a few minutes for the dust to settle and no one seemed put out by the fresh dents in the jeep. Someone in the crowd was coughing with a deep barking cough; obviously he would not be allowed on the patrol.

Commander Abu came up and, pointing out a mountain, told us to remember this feature, Mount Hermon, in case we were separated from the rest of the patrol and had to make our own way back. It was larger than the surrounding mountains and I was relieved we did not have

to climb it. The next thing Commander Abu told us was that this was in fact our objective.

He then waved forward a thin, weedy looking man who was introduced as Yunus, our new translator. Yunus smiled weakly, offered a limp-wristed handshake and said nothing. He then lit up a cigarette and immediately began coughing the deep barking cough we had heard earlier. This did nothing to boost our confidence in him.

Introductions over, Commander Abu wished us well, climbed into a jeep, switched on a cassette player and listened to music. Our original young companions were now subjected to much in the way of back-slapping and good natured parting camaraderie from the rest of the men. The group divided, after which the youngsters shouldered their weapons, jumped across a small ditch and set off on foot.

We watched them departing and surveyed the remaining party, who seemed in good humor and not in the least subdued by the prospect of the dangers of the coming patrol. We were cheered by this apparently sturdy attitude.

A Bite In The Dark

Our small group of original companions turned to wave goodbye. Yates and I responded in like manner. Yunus stood next to us watching. Commander Abu wound the window down on the jeep and, jabbing a stubby finger toward the waiting section said, "You go with them ... With them!"

It took a second for the awful truth to sink home: They were to be our security section. The rest of the men began climbing back into the jeeps as they revved up, jostled for position on the dirt track and

began to drive off.

A hurried question and answer session with Commander Abu revealed that we were to accompany this section and link up with the others later. Having to part from them at all was disturbing, being thrown in with half-a-dozen heavily armed teenagers and an interpreter, whose command of English was suspect, was distressing. We were forced to accept these reversals as the fortunes of war. Any further debate was impossible anyway, as Commander Abu drove off in pursuit of the other jeeps.

Mount Hermon loomed large in the late afternoon sun as Yates and I hurried to catch up with our appointed guardians. Shortly before reaching the shelter of some woods, one of the section members gave a loud scream and fell backwards. The rest of us hit the dirt and waited for the shooting to start. Nothing happened. One of the men stood up and kicked the man who had screamed. A hushed but heated exchange of words followed, whilst several of the section sniggered. Yunus offered a one-word explanation: "Snake."

The first fright of the night over, we carried on to the woods, where we stopped to wait until dark. Yunus lit up a cigarette. A few deep puffs were enough to set off his barking cough.

Yates reached deep into his pocket and produced a champagne cork. Ferreting in another pocket he came up with a second cork. He next produced a lighter and began to patiently scorch the corks in turn. This mystified the PFLP, who stopped talking among themselves.

7-Foot Stranger

All eyes were on Yates and the burning corks. Once satisfied with his handiwork, Yates handed one cork to me, spat on the other one and began to streak his face and hands with his homemade blackout camouflage paste. This was too much for our companions, who dissolved into helpless mirth.

As the Israeli army had a reputation for being a professional body of men, the last thing we wanted was to be live targets for them to practice on. Ignoring the effect on the PFLP, we continued to apply the burnt cork until satisfied we would no longer glow in the dark.

When the woods were dark and silent, Yunus crushed his cigarette out underfoot and warned us that we must not talk or make any noise as it would be dangerous. He then gave way to another fit of loud coughing. The others began to move off. The only sounds now were the rustling of leaves that carpeted the earth and the crackling of dry twigs underfoot. When we rejoined the footpath, even these sounds faded away, leaving only the gentle sound of the cool evening breeze.

Reaching a clearing, we gathered in a huddle and the section began to sprint across one at a time. Each man crouched low as he ran. The section gunner, armed with a PK belt-fed 7.62x54R GPMG, was



third in line. When he heaved himself up and began to sprint, the PK's metal ammunition box (mounted under the receiver and holding 100 rounds) rattled loudly. It was less than full, as he had previously removed 40 linked rounds to add to bandoleers worn bandit-style across his chest. These also clanked alarmingly.

Anxious at being last in line, Yates and I bolted across the clearing side by side. On the other side we were greeted by silence and still shadows. Of the PFLP there was no sign. We hurriedly continued along the path until it split in two. After a few seconds of indecision and mounting panic, we plunged down the right-hand branch. Our concern was compounded by having only the sketchiest details of the operation or the lay of the land. At each turn we anticipated contact with an alert and forewarned enemy. It was with some relief that we found the rest of the section.

Five minutes later we were peering across another clearing to the dark outline of a squat building. To speed things up the PFLP padded across in pairs; this time they would form up on the other side. To avoid losing the section a second time, Yates and I insisted on a more central position.

In a few wide strides we joined the lead elements on the far side. Behind us was a

house, with a large recessed doorway. I became uncomfortably aware that from its murky shadows we were being observed by a tall stranger, seemingly about 7 feet tall.

I tapped Yunus on the shoulder and he hissed at me to be still, turning to wave the last two men across the clearing. I grabbed his arm and gesticulated toward the doorway. Irritably he turned to gaze in the direction I indicated and gasped audibly, taking two steps back as he did so.

We heard a murmur of voices from inside the building. This giant was not alone. His silence was menacing. Then he spoke softly, with just a hint of a threat, and opened the door behind him, which flooded the path in orange lamplight and revealed that he was in fact a man of modest stature, standing at the top of a flight of stone steps. However, the metallic sheen reflecting off an assault rifle meant that he continued to receive our respect.

The section, much subdued, filed up the steps into the room behind the armed stranger. Yates and I had no option but to follow on behind. Dominating the far end of the room was a smoking brazier of hot

After night op, youngest section member carries Yunus' Kalashnikov as well as his own.

coals, around which sat half-a-dozen Syrian special forces (recognizable by their maroon berets) who eyed us quizzically as we entered.

The fetid warmth of the room was in marked contrast to the cool night, and beads of sweat began to carve through my burnt-cork cam paint, leaving white streaks in their wake. The PFLP section stood

in a meek semicircle until beckoned to sit down on an iron bedstead. Yates and I tried to sit anonymously screened by the rest of the section. A special forces sergeant, evidently in charge of the position, fired questions not directed at any of us in particular.

The question and answer session progressed amicably, with a degree of calm seldom encountered on the front lines of the Middle East. After 20 minutes, the questions ceased and the Syrians returned to gazing at the smoking brazier. The PFLP section sat in silence. This peaceful spell was only broken by the arrival of a sentry coming off watch.

He looked surprised to find so many extra bodies in the room. The relieving sentry stood up, climbed into a heavy, knee-length overcoat and wrapped a thick



woolen scarf around his head. Picking up an SKS rifle he warmed his hands by the brazier, then, turning on his heel, headed out the door. The PFLP section leapt to its feet and followed him out.

Yunus, the Keystone translator, almost got the author killed on a number of occasions.

Outside, the night seemed twice as dark and twice as cold. Led by the Syrian sentry we continued on our way along the same

path. The sentry stopped by a small bridge and pointed the way ahead. As each man in the section passed, he shook hands and exchanged a few words in Arabic.

“Bye-Bye, Johnny”

Clinging to the illusion that we had not been discovered as other than PFLP members, Yates and I now worried all was about to be revealed. When our turn came to shake hands, the sentry said nothing. He merely stared deep into our eyes. As we turned and walked away, he called out in mocking farewell, “Bye-bye, Johnny.” So much for our impenetrable disguise.

The pace was faster now with everyone anxious to distance themselves from the Syrian special forces. They had a mean reputation in Lebanon and were not to be trifled with. Speed was preferred over caution, and the gunner once again rattled metallically with each step. A few hundred yards further on, the woods began to thin, and the path began to incline steeply. The ground sloped up to the right and fell away to the left, where we could make out the flickering flames of a bonfire.

The section kept a close watch on the bonfire and slowed to a more cautious pace. Then someone screamed a command. The PFLP reaction was instant

PFLP members in Bekaa Valley hideaway have typical hodge-podge of weapons and clothing.

and did nothing to stem our rising tide of fear. They stopped dead in their tracks, rooted to the spot. Weapons clattered loudly as they were dropped and arms raised in surrender.

Suddenly the woods were alive with armed men. More commands were barked and a heated exchange began with

the PFLP. We had been ambushed and captured without a shot being fired. I prayed more cold-blooded shots would not begin now. Abiding by the terms of the Geneva Convention was not a big feature of Arab-Israeli clashes.

The PFLP section was allowed to pick up discarded weapons, after which we were ushered down another path, back into the interior of the woods. Given time to study our captors, I was surprised, and relieved, to recognize them as more Syrian special forces. They led us to a small building in front of which blazed the bonfire we had been trying to skirt.

Several large canvas tents were pitched close to the building with wooden benches beside them. Sitting on one of these, behind a trestle table covered with maps and note pads, was an officer. As we approached he looked up from the maps. Yates and I lurked discretely in the rear.

The officer was polite and motioned our

section to be seated on one of the other benches while he held a brief discussion with one of the men who had captured us. After this he stared at us long and hard, as if pondering what to do with his unexpected prize. He then began to direct questions at each of the PFLP in turn. As

Mervyn Yates, known among various Middle East factions as "The Moustache," is legendary in the TV news industry for his skill and willingness to accept hazardous assignments.



I was fascinated to hear what Yates would say.

He gazed firmly at the officer, coughed, looked at our PFLP companions, evidently considered which of the few Arabic words he knew was most appropriate, and deployed his best shot: "Imshi!" (Go away!) This rude response broke the ice; the Syrian officer laughed and in good English asked, "Perhaps you would like some tea?"

After this inauspicious start, Yates and I were invited to sit closer to the officer, who said he would be interested in talking to us. It was less a conversation than an opportunity for him to lecture us on the Middle East.

Nonetheless we listened intently and refrained from questioning some of his more radical opinions. When tea arrived there was plenty for everyone and it came with ample portions of kebabs. After an hour and a half of this, we were bloated and quite unfit for a night march up a mountain.

Soon we were free to go. Apparently what had happened was that because of the danger and unpopularity of recce patrols of the Israeli positions, a deal had been made. We would be allowed to continue on

condition that, after the patrol, the PFLP would report their findings to the Syrians, saving them the need to mount their own patrol.

The Syrians escorted us back to the edge of the woods and theatrically waved goodbye. Being spared the hazards of the patrol, they were in high spirits; the sounds of their banter fading behind us as we moved off across a boulder-strewn slope.

As the slope grew progressively steeper, the boulders grew smaller. Loose stones rolled underfoot and clattered downhill with each step, prompting a chorus of loud "shushing" from the PFLP section. Occasionally we came up against outcrops of rocks, which we had to gingerly edge round. Worse were the ones we had to climb over.

We pushed relentlessly on, our clothes soaked in sweat which chilled us during our infrequent halts in the cold night. At one rest I unwound the sweaty cam scarf from my neck and spread it out on a rock to cool, ready to mop my face. Nearby, I could hear Yates' labored breathing



but, the slope being exceedingly steep, his feet were level with my head.

Ready, Don't Aim, Fire

Sharp, thorny shrubbery and the gloom of the overcast night concealed me from his vision. Yates seized the opportunity of the halt to relieve himself of the copious amounts of tea he had consumed earlier. A hissed rebuke from me indicated that an adjustment in aim was called for. With profuse apologies, Yates obliged and instead scored a direct hit on my cam scarf, which probably lies to this day where I left it, draped over a rock.

After almost three hours of grueling effort, the slope rounded out. The clouds parted and shafts of bright moonlight washed silently across the mountainside, which was the last thing we wanted. The section stopped in a gully and held another whispered debate about whether to continue or abort the mission.

Yates and I were ready to call it a day but had no say in the decision-making. Our

fortunes were inexorably linked to those of this section. Yunus crawled across with the bad news. We would continue. Pressed for detailed information about when we were to link up with the main "assault team," he looked perplexed and said that we were the assault team. He confided that he too was unhappy about the mission and that we were now "in God's hands."

In hostile ground, between opposing armies, we could not afford to be separated from the section and had no option but to follow them. Above us the clouds dissolved, and an enormous full moon was like a searchlight in an empty sky. We could see for miles. Unfortunately, the Israeli positions were only a few hundred meters ahead, and they could see for miles, too. Yunus slithered up to us and said we were to follow him on our stomachs and not to smoke.

Dragging our equipment and lifting it gently over rocks, we inched forward. After 50 meters of heart-stopping effort, we slipped into a shallow depression surrounded by 3-foot high boulders. We were in a twisting re-entrant with three higher knolls surrounding our position.

The rest of the section never arrived. Yunus explained that they had moved off to one side from which to launch their assault and that we should prepare ourselves. Ungraciously, I expressed my belief that the only way to prepare for this was by a stint in a mental asylum.

Firefight In Marlboro Country

Yates and I cabled up the camera and video recorder, then positioned it to point in the direction Yunus estimated the Israeli position to be. He then said we could smoke if we wished. I thought that this was madness. He explained it was safe, that all we had to do was "cup our hands" to hide the match.

To our horror, before we could prevent him, he struck a match to light a cigarette. The cupped hands theory failed miserably; The flaring match lit up the surrounding rocks. Yunus lay back with a smug expression, inhaling deeply (the glowing cigarette no longer cupped by his hands).

He was shocked and alarmed when Yates threatened to throttle him, whilst I favored braining him with a rock, unless he stubbed out his cigarette. We both lunged for him ... as much as you can lunge while flat on your stomach and afraid to make a noise.

Before we reached him there was a loud explosion, followed a millisecond later by another. Then a single rifle shot ... two more ... a dozen ... the barking rip of a PK GPMG ... then a roar of automatic fire. Forgetting about Yunus, who instantly stubbed out the cigarette, plunged his fingers into his ears and closed his eyes, we rolled back to the camera and turned

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The soldier's lot: humping a machine gun, oblivious to heat, mud, rain, enemy fire — and his own sweat.

ANOTHER SALVO IN EL SALVADOR

FMLN Takes Advantage of Short-Supplied Government

Text & Photos by Steve Salisbury

KERBOOM! The crash of a 105mm artillery shell bursting a couple hundred meters from my bed of sharp rocks shattered the night sky and blasted me to reality from the depths of an erotic dream. My comrades — elite commandos of El Salvador's Atonal immediate reaction battalion — also were awakened. It was "friendly" fire.

Our company commander, a young lieutenant lying a couple of meters away from me, jumped to his knees and crawled to the radio. "Hey, careful ... You're hitting near us!" he whispered anxiously, cupping his hands around the receiver in the moonlight. The artillery started to harass and interdict elsewhere, and within minutes the lieutenant was back asleep.

I wasn't so lucky. Harassed by columns of jungle ants, I couldn't beat back the knowledge that in the morning some of us would probably be killed or maimed in an assault on an FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) guerrilla stronghold. I tossed and turned — awake the rest of the night.

Same War, New Rules

Since 1981, I have accompanied Salvadoran government forces — mostly as an SOF correspondent — on countless combat patrols during their 11-year-old war against communist insurgents. Fear, fatigue and suffering are always part of patrolling. This time, however, short on materiel due to the U.S. Congress holding back dedicated funds for military aid, we were playing with an even weaker hand.

A couple of months before, Congress had retained half of the \$85 million in

military assistance earmarked for El Salvador for fiscal year 1991 to prod the Salvadoran government to reach a negotiated settlement with the guerrillas. The United States also wanted El Salvador to clean up its human rights record and to carry out justice in the murder case of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter who were allegedly massacred by soldiers.

President Bush would eventually sign an executive order in mid-January 1991 to restore complete military aid to this war-torn Central American ally at an undecided future date (even though these issues remained at an impasse), citing as justifi-

cation a sharp increase in guerrilla violence.

soldier carry as many as 600 rounds for his M16, even for a short patrol; now Atonal soldiers were carrying generally between 210 and 300 rounds per trooper.

Grenadiers porting as few as a half-dozen 40mm rounds for their M79s or M203s used to be able to sling bandoleers of two or three dozen projectiles across their chests. Also shocking was the scarcity of infantry support weapons. Usually each company of an immediate reaction battalion carried a 90mm recoilless rifle or a mortar.

During the Atonal operations I joined last November and December, only one company was carrying a 90mm recoilless

"The last straw was when guerrillas

summarily executed two injured

American servicemen."

The last straw was when guerrillas summarily executed two injured American servicemen who survived the crash of their Huey helicopter shot down by rebel gunfire on January 2.

But no one had a crystal ball to foretell Bush's decision. In December 1990, the effects of the cut in aid were being felt in the field, as the Salvadoran military had begun to economize its resources — not knowing when, or if, it would receive the other half of the U.S. aid.

Before the halving of the military assistance, it wasn't unusual to see an elite

rifle (the other recoilless rifles were inoperable for lack of firing mechanism spares). Not one company carried a mortar. With the exception of a couple of light antitank weapon (LAW) rockets, our most powerful weapons were M60 machine guns — two or three per company in contrast to the one per squad that was common before.

Adding to our apprehension was the fact that we were facing an experienced and often better-armed enemy — emboldened by the reduction of the government's military aid — and that if we were pinned down by the guerrillas, odds were slimmer that we would receive air support or

helicopter medivacs.

Air force missions were curtailed to conserve fuel, sometimes even scrubbed because of the new threat from rebel shoulder-held surface-to-air (SAM) missiles. While guerrilla small arms and heavy machine gun ground fire have occasionally shot down military aircraft, the downing of an A-37 jet bomber last November was the first time a rebel missile was reported to be the cause.

“The plane dropped its bombs, and it was making another pass to strafe when I saw this stream of smoke shooting up from the ground,” recalled a soldier, ironically nicknamed Rocket. “It exploded near the tail and the plane turned up, then dropped to the ground in flames. As it was falling I saw a parachute appear.”

To prove it was no fluke, another rebel missile shot down an AC-47 gunship a couple of weeks later, killing longtime SOF readers and supporters Captain Reynaldo Nochez, pilot, and Lieutenant Ricardo Guzman, co-pilot.

The successful use of SAMs by the guerrillas marked a serious escalation in their campaign to topple a succession of two democratically elected civilian governments. These missile attacks were among the most dramatic incidents in a

been riveted on the Persian Gulf.

The events occurred during an FMLN “mini-offensive” that resulted in about four times as many deaths as the total suffered by the entire multinational Coalition in the Persian Gulf War.

Opportunity, Targets Tempt Rebels

The guerrillas were pushing especially hard in Usulután, where the long coastline was ideal for smuggling supplies, and the harvest season for cotton and other export crops made it a tempting economic target.

“Go to Usulután,” I was advised, knowing *Soldier of Fortune* covers wars from ground level. “It’s hot there. Atonal battalion is pursuing the terrorists who fired the SAM.”

At the Atonal HQ (the battalion is based in Usulután), I received a briefing from my old friend Lieutenant Colonel Alvaro Rivera Aleman, Atonal’s XO. Bolstered by reinforcements from neighboring provinces, the guerrillas had as many as 1,200 fighters in Usulután, he told me.

A few days before, a rebel unit of maybe light-battalion size tried to attack Usulután City, but was repulsed by Atonal Commander Colonel Nicolas Hernandez Quintalla, who showed why he is considered one of the Salvadoran army’s best field commanders by maneuvering his troops in a successful counterattack.

academy, as he briefed me in front of a wall map. While the main guerrilla thrust at Usulután City was thwarted, rebels had taken small towns and hamlets in the northern and western areas of the province.

The 1st and 3rd Companies of Atonal were now pushing north in a counter-clockwise arc, clashing with guerrillas in the area around Santa Elena, a small town briefly occupied by the FMLN 7 clicks northeast of Usulután City. Military intelligence had also detected a guerrilla threat from the south.

I joined the 5th Company the next day when it was dispatched to patrol the area. Before departing, I lunched with Lt. Col. Rivera Aleman in the officers’ mess. Our eating was interrupted by a breathless lieutenant. He reported the body of a corporal had been recovered. Guerrillas had captured the corporal as he lay wounded and later executed him by exploding a grenade on his chest. This wouldn’t be the last guerrilla atrocity to happen during my trip.

Lieutenant Edwin Chavarria was the commander of the 5th Company. The last time I saw him had been during a firefight in Morazan in 1984. This time our patrol encountered no resistance as we traversed green fields of sesame and cotton, ripe with snowy fluffs of fiber. But we were surrounded by intense fighting.

The pounding of artillery thundered in a firestorm 10 clicks to the east as soldiers of the 6th Brigade counterattacked guerrillas who had taken the small town of Jucuarán. When the 6th Brigade retook the village after a day of heavy fighting, some 16 soldiers lay dead; 25 had been wounded.

Meanwhile, an air force helicopter was shot down by small arms fire, as Salvadoran marines and guerrillas mixed it up about 8 clicks to the west.

“The guerrillas are better armed now and coordinate their actions much better,” Lt. Chavarria said. “The standard rifle of most of their units is the AK-47 instead of a mishmash of carbines and assault rifles as before. And now that they have SAMs to counter our air support, they are once again operating in units larger than company size, like in the early 1980s.”

Lieutenant Romeo Calle, the 26-year-old commander of the 4th Company said, “This war is going to drag on. Sometimes I think it will never end.”

An FMLN View Of Negotiations

Deputy Chief of Staff Col. Vargas, a longtime government representative in the peace talks mediated by the U.N., privately told me the guerrillas have been using negotiations only as a cynical ploy to dismantle the armed forces. Captured guerrilla documents give credence to this view.

One document published by New San Salvador University — and acknowledged as legitimate by FMLN members — expounded: “In dialogue as such we must have as our central objective keeping the

“... keep the enemy tied to

the table with a view to his

strategic weakening ...”



Author (in T-shirt) with Lt. Valle (in hat) and troopers of Atonal immediate reaction battalion. Photo: courtesy Atonal battalion

continuing accumulation of destabilizing events in El Salvador that have gone mostly overlooked as world attention has

Atonal suffered only 10 casualties. The 6th Brigade, however, also based in Usulután City, suffered more serious losses. The guerrillas left the bodies of a few dead comrades behind.

Bespectacled and scholarly, Col. Aleman looked every bit the professor he once was at the Salvadoran military

enemy tied to the table with a view to his strategic weakening and the building of a political umbrella against foreign intervention ... Dialogue is one of the forms of conspiratorial struggle and we must maintain it."

But who in the armed forces would publicly say "the emperor has no clothes" about peace negotiations when his commander-in-chief has made negotiations the cornerstone of his administration's policy?

Whether or not the armed forces believe in the possibility of a negotiated settlement, the government's conviction that a military solution is impossible or unacceptable has forced the armed forces to adopt a defensive posture based on keeping the guerrillas at bay, in the hopes that they eventually will quit.

This failure to see light at the end of the tunnel and the inability of the armed forces to make soldiering for an enlisted man an appealing, as well as patriotic, choice (with a monthly salary of less than \$50), have gradually created a military that has had to rely heavily on conscripts. The army didn't provide me with statistics on conscription, but informally surveying Atonal troops, I found roughly four out of every five were drafted, compared to the mid-1980s when most troops I met in immediate reaction battalions were volunteers.

What was shocking was that many of the conscripts I talked with didn't seem to know the ideological reasons why they were fighting. "Well, I was 'recruited,'" was a common response. "Recruited" is a nice way for Salvadorans to say dragooned. "Oh, they 'recruited' me on the bus," said one trooper. "I got 'recruited' at a dance," said another. "They 'recruited' me at my job where I was laying bricks. Man, was my boss mad!" yet another said.

Good Troops In Spite Of It All

Salvadoran soldiers — be they conscripts or volunteers — have proven to be good, courageous troops. And Atonal is among the best battalions, with a solid record of combat success. It would not be long before I would see their valor.

Shortly after we began our march north at 0700 on my second day with the 4th Company, several clicks west of Usulután City, waves of gunfire and explosions echoed through the mountains. The 1st Company was nearly surrounded on a mountain slope by a large rebel force several clicks to the north. After hours of battle, its commander, Lt. Julio Zelaya, deftly maneuvered his men to blast their way out of the guerrilla trap without suffering a casualty.

"It was pure rocket-propelled grenades [RPGs] and mortars," Lt. Zelaya related when our companies rendezvoused at mid-day. "It seemed that for every bullet we would fire, the terrorists would answer with an RPG. And they were accurate.



Atonal patrol poses before political graffiti. Although they are well-trained and in good spirits, author found the average conscripted grunt not at all politicized — right or left.

Their mortars started hitting our positions from the first shot. Damn! I wish we had all the ammunition they had. Our M16s were like pop-guns compared to their volume of fire. It was a miracle we didn't have any casualties."

The 1st Company had just hiked 30 clicks over rough terrain in two days,



Atonal troopers unload supplies from truck. The beans *si*, bullets *no*, see-sawing by the U.S. Congress in late 1990 cut sharply into operational supplies available to troopers in the field.

fighting most of the way, and had been in the field over a month straight. But Lt. Zelaya's morale was sky high. He still had the ever-present smile I remembered in

Morazan a decade ago, but his baby face had become hardened and lined after 10 years of seeing his buddies slaughtered and maimed.

Atonal had suffered about 30 casualties over the last few days. The well-entrenched guerrillas still held many of their positions about a dozen clicks north of Usulután City. We were going to have to rout them from the rear.

The plan was for the 1st, 4th, and 5th Companies to be trucked to the northern border of the province and advance south in parallel movement, while the 6th Brigade would form the blocking force, pushing north from Usulután. In other words, Atonal would be the hammer; the 6th Brigade, the anvil.

The Campesino's Fate

In the morning we trudged over hilly terrain, briefly resting at a *campesino's* crumbling hovel for lunch. "I live alone," the wizened old homeowner ruefully said, giving us a tin plate filled with shredded tripe and *tomate*.

A rambling pig almost knocked it over and a starving dog with protruding ribs appeared from nowhere to beg for scraps. "My wife left me. She couldn't take all the fighting here," the old man said. "Now it's just me and my pigs. I don't know if I'll be able to stay here much longer either. Those people [the guerrillas] are stealing cows and other animals, and they protect their friends who take your land. They want you to pay their taxes, and if you don't, God save you. But I have nowhere else to go."

In the late afternoon we camped in the shadow of Cerro Mono (Monkey Mountain) for the night. It was our first objective, a frequent guerrilla redoubt. We heard rumors that a guerrilla SAM team led by an Oriental woman and a large fair-skinned man with a foreign accent were holed up there.

Its terrain perfectly suited the defenders. Folded, steep slopes made it Mother

Nature's giant version of a once-wadded truncated dunce cap, feathered with dry vegetation. A half-dozen 3rd Brigade soldiers were recently captured assaulting its heights. And it would be a bitch to climb — especially since the guerrillas had sowed it with scores of mines and boobytraps.

The soldiers didn't disarm the mines, but marked them for the protection of future patrols. "We don't usually deactivate mines now," explained a Lt. Valle, tugging at his sparse mustache. "Sometimes the terrorists booby-trap them. Two weeks ago one of my men was severely wounded, losing an eye, when a mine in this same area exploded while he was deactivating it."

We continued our advance slowly, encountering a punji pit and a cluster of abandoned small guerrilla encampments. Lieutenant Valle estimated there must have been as many as a hundred insurgents here within the last couple of days, given the size and number of camps and the freshness of food remaining in opened cans.

I was glad when we took a rest at a *campesino's* home. My arms were scratched by thorns and my toes were bloody pulp. The *campesinos* were hospitable, giving us water and hot peppers. They told us they thought the guerrillas were still in the area we suspected.

The insurgents' stubborn holding of fixed positions had been costing them men. The family told us of how two dozen war-weary guerrillas abandoned their weapons after a firefight and begged them for food and water. "They were dressed in rags, sick, some wounded, and tired of the war," an old woman said. "They said that all they wanted to do was to return to their homes."

We said goodbye to the family and pushed on to hook up with the other companies for a later afternoon pow-wow to coordinate the next morning's assault. The companies then deployed 2 or 3 clicks apart in an east-west line about 4 clicks north of our main objective, the canton of El Nisperal, where some 300 guerrillas were believed to be entrenched.

My company occupied the west flank, the 5th Company held the center, and the 1st formed the east flank. Aleman and the command post were about 5 clicks behind our assault companies. We were in good position holding the high ground — we would be descending upon our objective.

Firefight At El Nisperal

A little after daybreak, gunfire erupted in El Nisperal. Soon it was punctuated by explosions — 6th Brigade troops had prematurely engaged the enemy. A McDonnell Douglas 500 'bubble' helicopter (formerly made by Hughes) promptly buzzed on the scene, hugging the terrain as a defense against SAMs, and riddled the guerrilla positions at the rate of 100 rounds

THE FMLN



Once a priority in the 1980s, when the United States drew a line against communist expansion in Central America, El Salvador now receives less attention.

The communist juggernaut appears less threatening as it breaks up on the rocks of its own economic fallacies. Unable to sustain a continuing cold war offensive, the communist bloc has been forced to adjust its support of surrogate revolutions. The Soviet-backed, Marxist Sandinista regime in neighboring Nicaragua was ousted in free elections in 1990.

Although the threat to the hemisphere posed by Salvadoran guerrillas may have subsided in geostrategic terms, their threat to El Salvador's fledgling democracy remains unabated. Despite the FMLN's adoption of democratic rhetoric and token peace gestures, such as not attacking voting activities for the first time during the elections of 10 March, the FMLN has not changed.

A conglomeration of five Marxist guerrilla armies which united at the behest of Fidel Castro in 1980, the FMLN has yet to show evidence of being anything other than an anachronism from the Stalinist legacy of misguided national liberation movements that struggle for power with bullets, bombs and conspiracy, and not by ballots.

A senior Latin American diplomat who meets regularly with FMLN leadership told me, "They have an old, dogmatic, Marxist conception. They apply dialectics. They are fossilized. They continue with their revolutionary, Marxist structures that have failed everywhere."

The statements of FMLN representatives (except when granting interviews to American media, mindful of their audience) confirm this observation.

"We believe that in El Salvador a revolutionary process with extremely good perspectives is developing, which is defeating those theses according to which the possibilities for revolution in Latin America don't exist anymore," declared FMLN emissaries Miguel Saenz and Ernesto Cisneros to a Buenos Aires newspaper as they made a recent tour of South America in search of support. "Today we can say that we are stronger on political, diplomatic and military grounds."

The U.S. State Department disputes this claim, insisting that the FMLN is being worn down and will either eventually have to settle on democratic terms to reincorporate itself into a civilian society, or face a bleak future of ever-growing isolation and irrelevant banditry.

Foggy Bottom's experts have been saying this for years, yet the war has dragged on into the '90s with casualty levels on par with those of previous years. The guerrilla campaign of economic sabotage is as strong as ever.

According to Salvadoran military sources, between 600 and 800 soldiers were killed last year, while more than double that number were wounded. Meanwhile, guerrillas routinely blackout the power grid, cut off water, burn farms and destroy vehicles, roads and bridges.

Aside from whether or not the FMLN is prospering politically or diplomatically, Salvadoran government combat troops can attest to one thing: The guerrillas' military capability is as strong as ever — or even stronger.

The retention of half of the U.S. military aid to the Salvadoran armed forces for several months in the face of an ever more potent guerrilla arsenal has had a serious, destabilizing impact.

The specific supply shortages and hardships it has caused for military operations can now be redressed as restored aid arrives; however, according to deputy chief of staff Colonel Mauricio Vargas, lasting damage has been done by setting a precedent that leads the FMLN "to perceive a deterioration of the alliance between the United States and El Salvador [that will] encourage it politically to [carry out] actions of destabilization against the government."

"I believe peace is possible this year," Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson told Congress after El Salvador's most peaceful free elections in years on 10 March.

The governing conservative party, ARENA, consolidated its legislative position in a landslide, while a coalition of leftist parties once affiliated with the FMLN increased its dismal 3.5% showing in the 1989 elections to a respectable mid-teens at the expense of the second-place Christian Democratic party, whose support plummeted substantially.

Hopes have been raised that the electoral results will help to unblock stalled peace negotiations. The vote proved the left can compete effectively in free elections. But it also revealed that Salvadoran society is polarizing. The former provides an encouraging rationale for the FMLN to lay down its arms and seek power by the ballot; the latter, to continue its "struggle" for it by the bullet.

— S.S.

In earlier times, this M203 gunner would have carried a couple bandoleers of 40mm rounds, but supplies were running low.

per second with its minigun.

The minigun belched no more than a half dozen two- or three-second burps, after which silence came to the battlefield. The guerrillas had scattered.

We were given orders to advance. Our company had hiked a couple of clicks when we were ordered to halt. The 1st Company had detected several guerrillas and warned the command element to be alert. Aleman dispatched three squads to find them, but it was too late. The guerrillas had already surrounded the command element, allowing it to descend into a valley.

A few sporadic shots were fired, then heavy fire roared and echoed like an avalanche in a canyon. We in the 4th Company thought the command element had cornered a few guerrilla stragglers, until radio traffic revealed the desperate situation the command element was in.

Guerrillas pounded it mercilessly with RPGs, homemade mortars called "catapults" and machine-gun fire. The soldiers hit the dirt and slithered to the nearest cover. Fighting was at such close quarters, a Huey, braving the peril of a SAM ambush to offer fire support, had to be called away without firing a shot.

The seven-man recon team of Sergeant Victor Hernandez was virtually wiped out. Employing fire and movement, guerrillas charged Hernandez's squad as two of his men lay gravely wounded, as the husky sergeant later recalled. While their comrades provided covering fire, guerrillas alternately ran and crawled, throwing homemade grenades.

Hernandez and one of his men killed three guerrillas who came within 15 meters. His private shot one dead just after the guerrilla threw a grenade at his sergeant, after which Hernandez blew away the other two with a rifle as they popped up to fire at his buddy.

But an RPG blast severely wounded the private's legs a moment later. Crawling, Hernandez tried to drag a couple of the wounded out of the line of fire. He pulled one onto the veranda of a nearby farmhouse. He tried to dress the wounded trooper in a change of civilian clothes given by a man in the house, but it was impossible. "Save yourself, sergeant," the soldier said, his weak voice barely audible as he slipped into unconsciousness and death. Hernandez put on the civilian clothes himself.

Withdrawal Under Fire

"Surrender, surrender!" the guerrillas screamed, their voices betraying that some of them were women and children. "Let's get out of here," the sergeant told the only other surviving, unwounded soldier, realizing nothing could be done to



"They shot them in cold blood, they

shot them in cold blood,"

he repeated in shock.

evacuate the wounded. "I'll go first. Cover me," Sgt. Hernandez said. He then escaped.

The private froze, then surrendered in despair. The guerrillas spared him. They weren't as kind to the wounded — they finished them off by riddling them with bullets.

The guerrillas almost killed Aleman. His assistant was shot in the leg. But Zelaya and the 1st Company arrived in the nick of time to open a corridor for the colonel and his escort to escape. This reinforcement forced the guerrillas to flee, ending the three-hour firefight.

Aleman estimated there had been about 40 guerrillas. Seven bodies were found by his troops; the guerrillas may have suffered 10 dead or more. Atonal's casualties were four dead, four wounded and two captured. The guerrillas handed over their captives to the International Red Cross a couple of days later.

Our day's dead had been recovered and lay in a row along the dusty road alongside a cooperative. The four corpses were covered with a tarp in an unsuccessful attempt to keep away the flies and curious peasants, who would lift it to peek at the gruesome sight.

Next to the four corpses lay a wounded soldier on a stretcher. Wounded in the leg, Pvt. Juan Marroquin had been found

hiding near his dead comrades. "They shot them in cold blood, they shot them in cold blood," he repeated in shock, reliving the massacre of his wounded *amigos*. He missed the chopper that evacuated the other wounded and had to wait for morning to be driven to Usulután City.

It wasn't even safe in Usulután City. In the evening, guerrillas mortared the Atonal barracks and the 6th Brigade, causing damage to civilian homes as well as military installations. At least one civilian was injured.

This guerrilla offensive didn't match the scope or intensity of the FMLN's nationwide offensive a year earlier (see "Battle of Five Cities," September '90). However, casualties were considerable. According to official estimates, in six weeks of fighting before the FMLN declared an end to the offensive on New Year's Day, there were about 600 dead and 1,000 wounded among soldiers, guerrillas and civilians, with the opposing combatant forces sharing the bulk of the casualties fairly evenly.

And once again the guerrillas failed to take a major town. In Usulután, Atonal made sure of that.

Senior Foreign Correspondent Steve Salisbury has covered Central America's conflicts for the last 11 years, frequently under fire in search of stories for SOF. ✕



CALL OF

SOF's Global Guide to High
Adventure: Summer '91

by Neil Livingstone

Photos Courtesy Jack Wheeler

Adventure travel means not only excitement, but also reliving history. This shot was taken on a trip retracing Hannibal's route through the Alps.

THE WILD

Wheeler with man-eating tiger, shot near Dalat, Vietnam, in 1961.



“THE best places,” Herman Melville once wrote, “are not on any map.” No one knows the truth of this statement better than Jack Wheeler, one of the world’s greatest living adventurers and a pioneer in the burgeoning new field of adventure travel.

If you’re looking for excitement, new challenges, new experiences, and a better understanding of yourself and your own limitations, then adventure travel may be for you.

Wheeler launched his adventure travel business in 1978, when he led his first trip to the North Pole. His decision to take seven other people along had more to do with economics than altruism.

“How else was I going to get to the North Pole but by having people pay me to take them,” he reflected. It was the first commercial tour to the North Pole, and such a success, he has repeated the trip 13 times, most recently in April 1990.

Adventure travelers are a mixed bag. Their only common denominator seems to be “the desire to have an experience they will never forget for the rest of their lives,” according to Wheeler.

He prefers to take small groups of people on his adventures who have been carefully screened for compatibility and what he refers to as “an adventurous spirit.” He is not fond of prima donnas and believes that large groups make bonding between the participants far more difficult. Although his 1988 expedition into the Kalahari to make contact with the bushmen consisted of eight men, he prefers mixed groups of men and women.

On the whole, he’s only had a few “duds” on his expeditions. One was a religious fundamentalist on a trip to Tibet who

Wheeler says one of the most compelling aspects of adventure travel is the different sorts of people one encounters, such as these Karen National Liberation Front (KNLA) fighters of eastern Burma.





Wheeler during one of his 13 trips to the North Pole. His last trip was in April 1990.

Wheeler first swam the Hellespont when only 16 years old.



Enrique Bermudez with Wheeler. (Enrique was recently murdered by the Sandinistas.)

On one of many excursions to Africa, Wheeler's party met with Jonas Savimbi and UNITA soldiers in Angola with downed Antonov 2.



challenged Wheeler's geography lecture to other members of the group. The man was particularly incensed by Wheeler's assertion that certain rock formations were 60 million years old.

This was a lie, the man screamed, since the Bible clearly indicated that the earth was only 4,000 years old. He became so upset that he began to rave and swear at Wheeler and the other members of the group. When the man wouldn't calm down, Wheeler threw him off the expedition.

On another trip, a woman, the wife of a prominent Washingtonian, decided in the middle of a 4,000km trek from Lhasa to Kashgar that she "would rather be in the Bahamas, and wanted a helicopter to come pick her up." To emphasize her desire to bail out, she went on a hunger strike.

A helicopter was out of the question, and since they were totally out of communication with the outside world, the woman was finally forced to relent and stick it out until they reached civilization.

"When you're in a restaurant and talking about going to a plateau in Tibet and having the adventure of a lifetime, it sounds wonderful, romantic, and adventurous," Wheeler said. "People dream of all the stories they'll be able to tell the folks back home.

"But the reality is different. Traveling in a primitive country at an altitude of 15,000 feet for three weeks is tough and punishing." According to Wheeler, potential participants need to examine their own motives and desires before signing on for such a trip.

You Don't Have To Be Rich

A person does not have to be rich to enjoy adventure travel. "I'm living proof of that," Wheeler laughed. "There are no hotels, after all, in the middle of the Amazon jungle. The object of adventure travel is to get beyond the tourist traps where they're charging ridiculous prices."

The trip to the North Pole is an exception, he said, because of the logistics. Aviation fuel cost \$8 a gallon in the higher Arctic and nearly \$20 a gallon when positioned in a fuel cache at the North Pole.

The essence of adventure travel, according to Wheeler, is not cheap thrills, but rather self-realization. "The purpose of adventure is to make your life special," he said. "Meeting the special challenges of adventure travel can change and transform your life. I want to teach people, for example, how to go beyond what they think their limits are."

Is the element of danger or risk a necessary part of adventure travel? Wheeler says it is. "But an appropriate level of risk ... There has to be a challenge. You must push your personal envelope." He is quick to add that he is fully cognizant of the dangers involved and takes every practical measure to minimize the risks.

"Besides," he added, "most jungles are

safer than many cities in the United States. I'll go into any jungle, but I won't go into the South Bronx." In the final analysis, Wheeler believes that the amount of risk "must be tailored to you, and depends on what kind of individual you are."

He also is concerned about the liability factor, which has become a real burden in recent years. Although he's never had anyone injured on one of his expeditions, Wheeler worries that Washington, where he now lives, is the "litigation capital" of the United States, and that, "So many people are unwilling to take the responsibility for their own lives and actions." He makes people sign liability waivers at the outset of his trips.

Adventure Humor

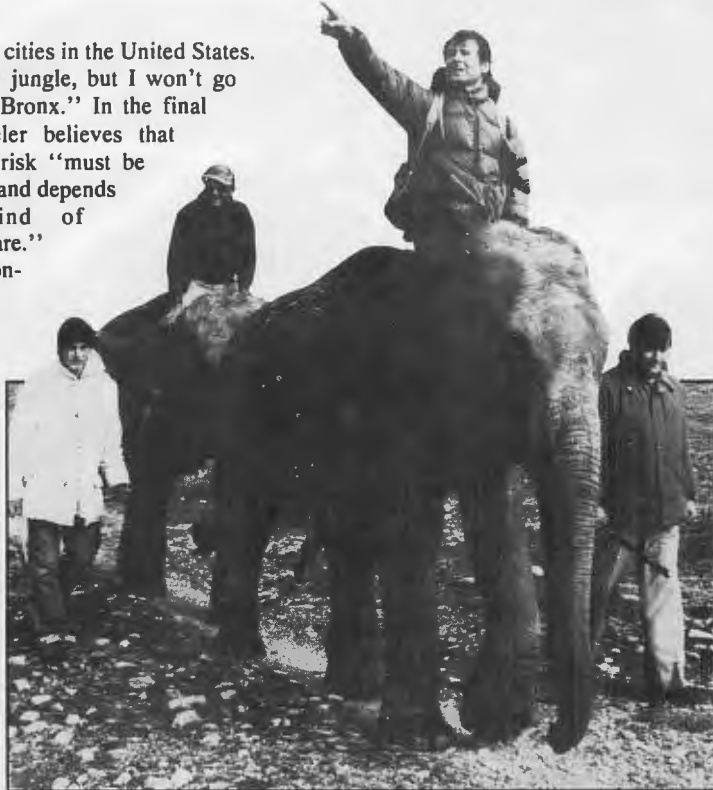
Occasionally the risks have a humorous side. Some years ago he led an expedition to Papua New Guinea to collect primitive art and make contact with a band of headhunters that had never before seen anyone from the outside world.

One of those in his party was his former fiancée, Jacqueline King, a Las Vegas showgirl who later died of cancer. After an arduous journey, they finally located the headhunters, one of Wheeler's three "first contacts" with primitive tribes. Wheeler's group was invited to Shokup, the cannibal village, and warily agreed to go.

They met with the chief, an old man with filed-down teeth and feathers in his hair. He was surrounded by a large group of villagers. As Wheeler and his party were introduced, the chief said something to Jacqueline in his local dialect and everyone around him burst out laughing. Wheeler asked his translator what the chief had said. The translator responded that the old cannibal had told the comely Jacqueline, "You look very delicious."

When asked if small wars and insurgencies have a place in adventure travel, Wheeler has mixed views. While admitting that some of his "most adventurous experiences have been with anti-Soviet insurgents," he does not recommend chasing wars as a way of getting a natural high.

Only once, he said, has he taken a group of people into a war zone. It was to Jamba, the rebel "capital" of Angola, where his group met with Jonas Savimbi and other anticommunist insurgent leaders. "It was relatively safe," he said. "There is a



Perhaps not the most comfortable form of transportation, elephants have often been the only way to go in Wheeler's travels.

distinction, after all, between taking someone into guerrilla-held territory and taking them into a war."

Only if there were "a very good reason," Wheeler said, would he lead an expedition into an actual war zone. A good reason, he said, would be the willingness and ability of those in the party to help the guerrillas in some fashion. Citing this logic, he took Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) to Afghanistan to meet with mujahideen rebels.

At one point, they were subjected to a mortar barrage, but Wheeler never wavered in his conviction that such risks were justified, as Rohrabacher was in a position to help the mujahideen in Congress.

Basic Requirements

Some adventures require top physical conditioning and special skills such as mountaineering or parachuting. On the other hand, most of Wheeler's expeditions are designed for the ordinary person who is in good physical condition and has an adventurous spirit.

Wheeler's own adventure skills include map and compass reading, sailing, navigation, first aid, mountaineering, scuba diving, and parachuting. He said, however, that his greatest assets are the "experience he brings to any expedition" and his "common sense."

In addition, he contends that "the ability to get along with people" is critical to any successful adventure traveler. "Human beings are the same everywhere. If you treat them with regard and respect



The Aucas, called "the most murderous savages in the world" by missionaries, treated Wheeler pretty well. Woman is holding a *Playboy* magazine Wheeler gave her.



and are friendly to them," they will be allies rather than impediments in helping you achieve your goals.

Unlike the movie adventurer Indiana Jones, to whom Wheeler has often been compared, he is not particularly interested in archaeology or artifacts. Nor has he ever hunted buried treasure or searched for Bigfoot or the Abominable Snowman. It's people, he said, that interest him. For Wheeler, the greatest reward is meeting other people and observing their cultures.

If Wheeler has any regrets about his own action-packed life, it's that he didn't have the eyesight to be a Navy fighter pilot. Landing on the deck of a carrier, he said with awe, "has to be one great adventure."

But it is for astronauts that he reserves his greatest admiration. "They are truly heroic figures," he asserted, and they are engaged in "the greatest adventure of mankind: the exploration of space." Indeed, he believes that the most extraordinary feat in human history was when Neil Armstrong first set foot on the moon.

For the beginning adventure traveler,

Wheeler offers a list of great adventures that require only good health and minimal specialized skills. All can be accomplished for less than \$5,000 a person.

Climb The Matterhorn

It was Wheeler's first adventure, and he still recommends the climb to the top of one of the world's most famous mountains. At 14,690 feet, the Matterhorn is only the seventh highest peak in Europe, but Wheeler believes it provides the adventure seeker with a real taste of mountaineering and, for those who reach the summit, a strong sense of accomplishment.

There are many reputable guides, but he recommends contacting Alfons Franzen at the Christiania Hotel in Zermatt, Switzerland. "Alfons will take you on a number of practice climbs," Wheeler said, "then guide you up the Matterhorn's Hornli Ridge every step of the way." The climb will take two days and, according to Wheeler, September is the best month to make the ascent. (Judging by the number of times Wheeler has made this climb, it seems to be one of his favorite



Adventure started early for Wheeler. This shot, on the Matterhorn, was taken when he was 14 years old. On the right is Swiss guide Alfons Franzen.



Wheeler meets Jivaro headhunter and friend on one of many excursions to the Amazon.

Huseyin Uluaslan figured out how to make the infamous currents work for them instead of sweeping them out to sea.

Wheeler said to allow a week or two for the swim any time during the summer, and not to forget to visit the ruins of Troy and other sites associated with Greek mythology. Contact Huseyin Uluaslan, Yali Cad-desi No. 2, Canakkale, Turkey.

Scuba Dive In Micronesia

Continental's Air Micronesia ("Air Mike") flies west out of Hawaii and stops at islands "every diver dreams about: Ponape, Truk, Yap, and Palau." According to Wheeler, "Much of the 4th fleet of the Japanese Imperial Navy was trapped in Truk Lagoon and blasted like fish in a barrel during World War II.

"You can swim right through them and even sit in the cockpit of a Zero sunk in shallow water. It's really fantastic." On Yap, he said, "The women still wear grass skirts, but your eyes will bulge out even more at the sights underwater, especially at all the mantas and sharks off the island's southern tip."

In addition to Palau's walls of soft coral, and the maze of rock islands (through which your divemaster will race his speedboat), "It is Jellyfish Lake that makes Palau truly memorable. The lake holds millions of jellyfish which are harmless and don't sting. Snorkeling among them is a tale you'll tell your grandchildren about."

The best time to go is from June to September, and you should allow at least two weeks. Contact: Dive Pohnpei, Box 1090, Ponape, Micronesia 96941; Blue Lagoon Dive Shop, Box 429, Truk, East Carolines 96942; Yap Divers, Box 177, West Carolines 96943; Neco Marine, Box 129, Koror, Palau 96940.

Drive The Karakorum Highway

"Many people think the drive from



Wheeler occasionally finds himself in war zones in his continuing search for adventure. This shot, of a RENAMO freedom fighter, was taken in Zambezia province, Mozambique.

Lhasa, Tibet, to Katmandu, Nepal, through the Himalayas, which passes Mt. Everest in the distance, is the world's most spectacular," Wheeler said. "But it doesn't compare to the 'KK' in northern Pakistan."

Beginning at Rawalpindi, you follow the Indus River past Nanga Parbat, the western terminus of the Himalayas, to Gilgit. Just beyond Gilgit is the famous valley of Hunza. "Watching the sunrise on 25,580-foot-high Rakaposhi from the hanging village of Karimabad, suspended above Hunza Valley, is one of the world's great sights," Wheeler said.

"And it gets better after Hunza as you wind past enormous glaciers and the peaks of the Golden Throne, all the way to 'K-Top.' This is the 15,420-foot-high

adventures.)

Run The Upper Ganges

The source of India's holy river, the Ganges, is an ice cave called *Gaumukh* (the cow's mouth) in the Gangroti glacier, which is located in the Garhwal Himalayas of northern India.

From Gaumukh to its confluence with the Alaknanda at Deoprayag, the river is called the Bhagrathi, or Uttar Ganga (the Upper Ganges). Many experts consider running the Uttar Ganga to be the greatest white water raft trip on earth. The trip takes at least two weeks, and should be done between March and May. Contact Shaukat Sikand, 16 Subroto Park, New Delhi 110010, India.

Swim The Hellespont

Wheeler highly recommends the swim across the Hellespont, the most famous straits in the world, which separates Europe and Asia. It's 3 miles, and anyone who attempts it should be a strong swimmer in top condition.

Wheeler almost drowned on his first attempt until he and his companion



THE "REAL THING"

In a world of pale imitations, 46-year-old Jack Wheeler is the "real thing." He's an honest-to-God Indiana Jones, a latter-day adventurer in search of the modern equivalents of the source of the Nile.

There's also something of the perpetual kid about Wheeler. When he talks about his adventures, his eyes light up, he becomes animated. He is Huck Finn plotting the great raft trip. Adventure travel is nearly a religion to him. "I believe in life on earth," he said. "What comes after, no one is sure. This is the life that matters ... and what you do with it."

Wheeler's lust for adventure began as a youth. He climbed the Matterhorn when he was 14, swam the Hellespont at 16, and lived with headhunters in the Amazon at a time when getting a Saturday night date was an adventure for most of his contemporaries.

Over the years, he's retraced Hannibal's route over the Alps on elephants, parachuted onto the North Pole, walked across Tibet twice north-to-south and twice east-to-west, hunted black bears in the Kashmir, lived with Mongol nomads in their *yurts* (felt tents) in the Gobi Desert and made contact with Mbambuti Pygmies in northeastern Zaire.

Is that all? Not even close.

He's climbed the Great Pyramid of Cheops, scuba dived with great white sharks on the Barrier Reef of Australia, played piano at the Folies-Bergeres, explored the mystery of the brooding statues of Easter Island, recorded a "first contact" with a small band of bushmen in the Kalahari Desert, climbed Kilimanjaro, searched for headhunters in New Guinea, and swam under waterfalls with native girls in the South Pacific.

He has gotten to know the "giraffe" women of Burma, the mysterious Dogon people of Mali, and the Wali-ali-fo cannibals of Papua New Guinea. The Temple of the Tooth in Sri Lanka and the "Cotton Castle" of Pamukkale are just two of the obscure, yet magical, places he has stumbled across on his journeys.

Along the way, he also managed to earn a doctorate in philosophy and write a book called *The Adventurer's Guide*. He was the subject of a Dewar's scotch profile and served as the arctic location adviser to Clint Eastwood during the filming of *Foxfire* in Thule Bay, Greenland.

On his own time, he mixes politics with adventure by fighting other people's wars. A veteran of six anticommunist guerrilla conflicts, he is credited by many observers as being the inspiration for the "Reagan Doctrine."

Consistent with his political agenda, during the past year he has been leading study tours to Eastern Europe in order to witness first hand the collapse of communism and to lend support to the fledgling democracies in that region.

In early 1989, Wheeler moved to suburban Virginia with his wife and young son. A life-long Southern Californian, he admits that many of his friends thought he was crazy when he pulled up stakes to trade his comfortable La Jolla home, overlooking the ocean, for Washington's torpid climate and the uncertainty of starting a new business in a new city.

But he has no regrets. "La Jolla is very laid back," he said. "In Washington life's not just a beach, it's the center of the world."

He said his work as a popular motivational speaker/writer can be based anywhere, although he is less certain about his adventure travel business. Washingtonians, he worries, take less time off than their California counterparts, and seem to be more traditional in their approach to travel.

On the other hand, Wheeler enjoys a strong national following, and the participants on his expeditions come from all over the United States.

Wheeler's wife of seven years is a bright and vivacious red-head named Rebel Holiday. "It's such a great name, how could I ask her to take mine?" Wheeler said, without a trace of self-consciousness. "Her brother's given name," he added, "is Yankee."

In Southern California, Rebel operated a successful image consulting business, and hopes to repeat that success in the Washington area.

Wheeler and Rebel seem to reaffirm the old maxim that "opposites attract." While there is a certain studious casualness about Wheeler, Rebel is perfectly turned out. Her long red nails don't look like they'd last very long in the Amazon. When asked if Rebel shared his passion for adventure travel, he replied enthusiastically that they "travel a lot together."

Although he loves the wild and untamed places, he still appreciates a fine hotel and a good meal. "I love civilization," he explained. "I think the inventor of the hot shower is one of the great benefactors of mankind. The trick is being able to flow back and forth between wilderness and civilization."

"I'm no lover of wilderness for its own sake. The world does not have any intrinsic value; it has the value we give to it. It is civilization, by contrast, that gives value to the wilderness."



Wheeler

Khunjerab Pass on the border with China."

The best time to go is July and August, and you should allow two weeks for the journey. Contact: Iqbal Walji, 10 Khyaban Suhrawardy, Islamabad, Pakistan, to arrange for a four-wheel drive vehicle and driver.

Explore The Amazon

Again, taking a page from his own autobiography, Wheeler believes every adventurous traveler should see the unspoiled Amazon. "If you want to get out into the heart of the Amazon," Wheeler advised, "fly to Manaus in Brazil and link up with a reputable guide such as Francisco Almeida or Kurt Gluck."

"Both can get you away from the tourists, the settlers, and the new roads, and deep into the untouched jungle to visit tribes you only see in *National Geographic*." April through September are the best months to go, and the prospective traveler should allow at least two weeks. Contact: Francisco Almeida, Sua Sao Luiz 91, Manaus, Brazil; Kurt Gluck, Quintino Bocaiuva 224, Manaus, Brazil.

Trek With The Abos

If you'd like to explore the land of Crocodile Dundee, Wheeler recommends taking a "walkabout" with aborigines in the Kakadu Wilderness in northern Australia.

The Kakadu has unique tropical wildlife, crocodile-infested lagoons, and prehistoric art sites. "The Abos," Wheeler said, "will show you how they live in the outback and take you to an aboriginal cooroboree." Try to allot two weeks between March and October for your "walkabout." Contact: Willis's Walkabouts, 12 Carrington Street, Milner, Darwin, NT 0810, Australia.

Skidoo Across The Arctic

"The outfitter for my North Pole expeditions is a fellow from Madras, India, named Bezal Jesudason," Wheeler said. "He lives with his wife, Terry, in Resolute Bay, Canada, and speaks Inuktituk, the language of the Eskimos."

"During two weeks — and May is the best month — Bezal can arrange for the Inuit Eskimos of Grise Fjord, which is the northernmost community in North America, to take you via skidoo and komatik (Eskimo sled) over the frozen Arctic Ocean to Resolute."

"You'll see polar bears in the wild, hunt seals with spears, sleep in an igloo on caribou skins, and experience the Arctic and the Eskimo way of life the way few others have." Contact: Bezal or Terry Jesudason, Box 200, Resolute Bay, NWT, Canada.

Explore The Kalahari

According to Wheeler, "The fellow to take you through the Kalahari Desert, from

— N.L.

the Tsodilo Hills, sacred to the bushmen, to the Makgadikgadi Pans, and into the Okavango Swamps, is Peter Comley." The trip will take a minimum of two weeks and should be done anytime between June and August.

"Peter will put together a private expedition through an extraordinary part of Africa for a very reasonable cost," Wheeler said. Contact: Peter Comley, Africa Calls, Private Bag 13, Maun, Botswana.

Learn To Sky Dive

"I might as well get in a plug for my favorite sport," Wheeler announced. He recommends going to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where "professional instructors will, no kidding, safely teach you how to jump out of a perfectly good airplane. They use a new teaching method called AFF, or accelerated free fall.

"Two jumpmasters go out the door with you at full altitude (more than 10,000 feet) with no static line; they hold you in the air, then pull your rip cord. After just a few jumps, you'll be able to do it by yourself. No kidding." Contact: any of the instructors at 3506 Airport Road, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

JACK WHEELER'S 10 DREAM ADVENTURES

Wheeler maintains that there are still "firsts" that can be achieved by the truly adventurous. For those in search of once-in-a-lifetime excitement, he offers 10 great expeditions.

Not all are "firsts," but each expedition is unique and offers those with the mettle to try a rare experience. Only the most well-heeled and daring need apply. All of these require unusual resources and time; most are risky.

From Casablanca To The Red Sea

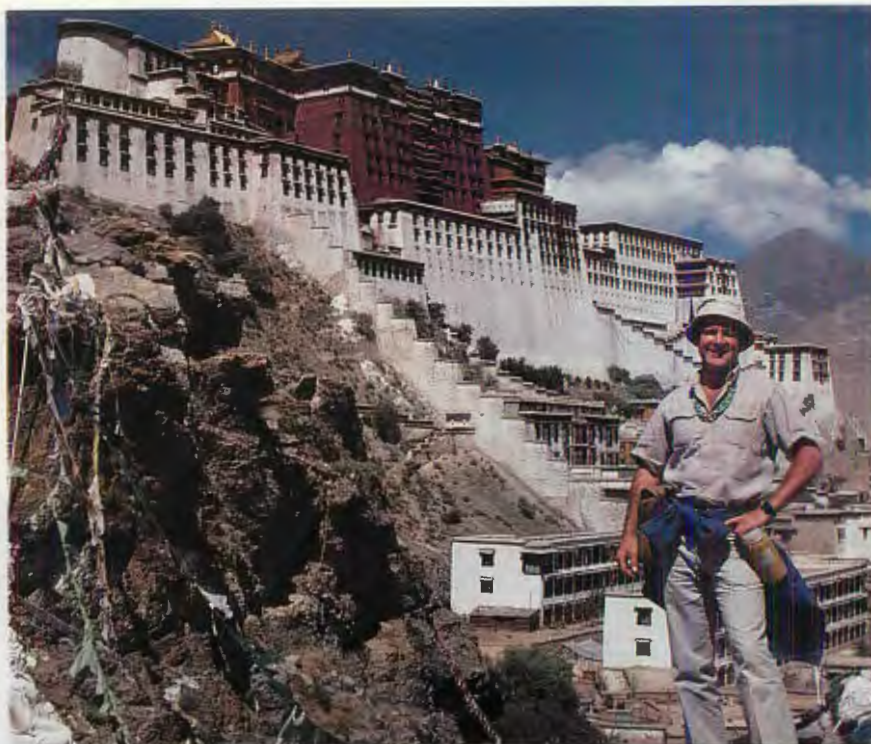
According to Wheeler, crossing the Sahara is almost always done north-to-south, generally from Algeria to Niger or Mali, and then onward in a southerly direction.

Rarely is the world's largest desert transited west-to-east. "The route I'd like to take would be through the Sahara's most spectacular and inaccessible areas," Wheeler said. He envisions a route that would take him from Casablanca, on the Atlantic Ocean in Morocco, across the Atlas Mountains to Bechar in Algeria.

From there, he'd head for the In Salah and Djanet Oases, through the Hoggar Mountains to Tamanrasset. From "Tam," as it is known, his expedition would go through the Air Mountains and the Tenere Erg in Niger to the Bilma Oasis, entering Chad at Zouar.

In Search Of Lizzie Webber

In the South China Sea are a group of islands called the Spratlys, which are claimed by China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. "All of them send troops



An important part of adventure travel is getting away from five-star hotels and tourists to see what else is "out there." This shot was taken in front of the Potola Palace, Lhasa, Tibet.

to occupy various islands among the Spratlys," Wheeler noted, "and occasionally they duke it out, particularly the Chinese and Vietnamese."

The islands are low-lying atolls barely above sea-level, with numerous reefs and shoals, many of which are uncharted, making for extremely dangerous sailing. For Wheeler, the most interesting place in the Spratlys, if not one of the most interesting places on the entire planet, is the island of Lizzie Webber.

Although he does not know the origin of the name, he said that "it's a place I just have to get to, and it's in a war zone to boot. Ever since Bob Brown, publisher of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, and I went into Afghanistan together, we've been talking about our next adventure. This is probably it."

Exploring The Great River Trenches Of Asia

This was the title of a series of articles in *National Geographic* in the late 1920s by explorer Joseph Rock.

"Look at the map north of Burma," Wheeler exuded, "and you'll see one of the world's most extraordinary geographical formations: Three of Asia's great rivers — the Salween, the Mekong, and the Yangtze — pouring off the Tibetan plateau to carve three gigantic gorges paralleling each other for hundreds of miles.

"It's as if some god dragged three fingers right through the earth." While the upper Yangtze was first rafted by Ken Warren in 1986, the other two rivers have yet to be conquered. Warren, incidentally, lost his raft and had to walk out, encountering on the way aboriginal tribes wearing animal skins. "It's one of the last areas on earth where real exploration can

be conducted," Wheeler said. He vows not to undertake such an expedition, however, until the current government in China is replaced.

Circumnavigating The Indian Ocean

The wildest, most exotic and inaccessible islands on earth lie in the Indian Ocean, Wheeler said, especially those in the "screaming fifties," the islands at 50 south latitude of sub-Antarctica.

"I've always wanted to explore them and now I know how," he said. "There's a Catalina PBY amphibian plane flying commercially in Africa ... I'd like to try and offer this expedition commercially in 1991."

Marco Polo: Venice To Peking

The route of Marco Polo's famous journey across Asia, with his father Nicolo and uncle Maffeo, has never been retraced in its entirety. Beginning in 1271, when Marco was 17, it took three years.

Wheeler proposes to launch this expedition in Venice and travel to Jerusalem. The next leg would take him through eastern Turkey and Iran, down to Hormuz, and up to Afghanistan. Other adventurers have duplicated this much of the route. But where they left off, Wheeler would press on, up through the Wakhan Corridor — the neck of Afghanistan separating Pakistan from the Soviet Union — into the Pamir Mountains, now in

Continued on page 92

Not a disco or hamburger to be found — only raw, tropical nature, and you.
Photo: K. Settergren



“VACATION” is an ambiguous word. One man’s this is the other man’s that, and so forth — it all depends.

Jimmy and Janey’s idea of vacation was different from mine.

The three of us were standing on a corner in the town of Valladolid in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. I had just slithered into civilization after a few days in the bush and, not having talked to anyone for a while, thought I would go say hi.

Jimmy and Janey were from Ohio, all fresh-looking and clean-cut as if they had just stepped out of the Dayton J.C. Penney’s. Their matching polo shirts were new, their jeans were pressed, their shoes were spotless. No stray hair could be found on either of them.

I looked like I had just come out of my cave, searching for something to kill. Sunburnt, unshaven, dry mud streaking from my chest to my

bare feet, hair sticking every direction except down, it was all I could do to keep the Bobbsey twins from running away as we talked.

But our little conversation was enlightening.

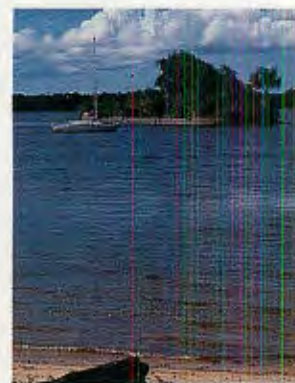
Apparently, a lot of people have a thing for *gringo* tourists swarming everywhere, crowded beaches, hamburgers, discos, postcards, high prices, running water, clean sheets, speedy room service and air conditioning.

Jimmy and Janey certainly did.

Their two-week vacation to Mexico meant speeding from one four-star hotel to another, eating only “safe” American food and hitting all of the big *turista* spots. With their rental car, they were burning more than \$150 a day. This was their idea of vacation.

They looked at me strangely when I told them what I had been doing over the past couple of weeks: hanging out with locals, eating in fly-infested dives, living in the jungle, chasing a pig with three Mayan Indian guys through a back alley of Cuba, working as free

Speeding into the jungle interior. Photo: John Coleman



Another podunk island to investigate. Photo: John Coleman



A FISTFUL OF PESOS

*SOF's Guide
to Hard-core Relaxation
in the Wilds of
Central America:
Summer '91*

by John Kreiger

labor (washing dishes) for a day in a *barrio* restaurant for the hell of it ...

Jimmy and Janey, obviously not SOF subscribers, could not understand that vacation could mean: breaking free, living differently for a while, kicking into some hard-core relaxation, and chasing down wild adventures.

Central America is an excellent place for all of this. Hundreds of distinct cultures, thousands of miles of

One of thousands of Mayan temples scattered throughout Central America.
Photo: K. Settergren



beaches, Mayan ruins, mountains, deserts, rain forests, strange people — once you're away from the resorts, there's no limit to what can happen.

The following destinations are just a few of many where you will, fortunately, never get a chance to talk with Jimmy and Janey.

Tulum, Peninsula de Yucatan

There is almost nothing in Tulum: no hotel, no bar, no restaurant, no disco. There is only beautiful white sand, a sizzling sun and palm-lined beaches on the emerald Caribbean Sea. Raw, tropical nature spreads to



the horizon in every direction.

Tulum is a place to do very little. You can read, run on the beach, go stupid in the surf, do nothing, or sing to the moon until you drop. This is a place to *relax*.

If you can't relax, you can head out to the largest reef in the Americas and the second largest in the world; it's only 500 meters offshore. Bring your own gear (including fins). You may also want to head up the beach a few miles to Xel Ha, where the waters are even clearer — on most days, you can see for more than 60 meters.

The easiest way to get to Tulum is to fly to Cancun or Cozumel. Once you land in either of these places, get out immediately or risk running into Jimmy and Janey buying \$5 Coronas. From Cancun, take a bus to the southern end of town and get on the only highway heading south, Highway 307.

There will be all sorts of traffic moving south, everything from Mayan farmers in trucks to turistas in vans to Mexican families in



ABOVE: Pacific Ocean near Chirripo National Park, Costa Rica. Photo: R. Settergren

ABOVE: Deserted beach, Golfito, Costa Rica. Photo: R. Settergren

VW bugs. To hitch a ride should take no more than an hour. (Hitchhiking is legal in Mexico, and if you smile, should have no problem getting a ride.) Tell people you want to go to the Tulum crucero (intersection), about 75 miles down the road.

From Cozumel, you'll need to take a boat to Playa del Carmen on the mainland. Be sure to board one of the slow boats, which cost considerably less. From Playa, directions are the same as from Cancun — get out to Highway 307 and head south. From Playa, you'll only be about 38 miles from the Tulum crucero.

After being dropped off, start walking east toward the ocean. Half an hour later, you'll come to the Tulum ruins and a few small stores. Take a right turn and walk south. After another 30 minutes, you'll see some bungalows on the beach to your left.

Altogether, there are five groups of bungalows in the area, all of various quality. The most primitive (and cheapest) are the El Mirador *cabanas*, about \$5 a night.

The more upscale bungalows offer places to get bottled water and a bite to eat; you will save a lot of pesos, however, by purifying (boiling) your own water from the nearby well and catching your own food (fishing is excellent near Tulum). Pack some hot peppers and salt to flavor your catch.

While you may be staying near 20 or 30 other travelers (mostly nude Europeans and clothed Mexicans), you'll be completely alone after a 10-minute stroll down the beach. And the beach stretches all the way to Belize, more than 120 miles away.

To enter Mexico, you'll need a valid passport and a tourist card.

Cards are available from travel agents or Mexican consulates.

La Mosquitia, Honduras

The rugged jungles of the Mosquito Coast and eastern Honduras are in the least-known and least-explored part of Central America. If you are experienced in jungle survival techniques and are ready for a challenge, this may be the adventure you've been looking for.

On the coast are occasional fishing villages inhabited by Black Caribs, descendants of Mosquito Indians, pirates and African slaves. Further inland are villages such as Auka, Wawina and Sirsirtara. Very few *Norte Americanos* have even been close to these places — information on them is almost nonexistent.

A trip to this area would require considerable planning, and no small amount of endurance. It could also be dangerous. Places to stay will be rare, so thorough preparations for living in the jungle should be made. Once you get to a village, especially in the interior, communication will be an obstacle, even if you speak Spanish.

Exploring this untamed region, however, will likely reap benefits in proportion to the difficulties of getting there. There is nothing quite like the feeling of going where few (if any) have gone before, living with tribes of primitive people you've scarcely even heard about.

To get there, first fly to Tegucigalpa. The only region of the country not accessible by road is the Mosquito region, so you'll have to get on another plane. According to a 1991 guidebook, flights to Brus Laguna on the northeast coast leave three times a

week. Once you're there, head up the Patuca river and enjoy.

To enter Honduras, you'll need a valid passport and a round-trip airline ticket. You can buy a Honduran visa for \$2 after you enter the country at the customs station in the airport.

San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas

Chiapas is among the most ignored regions of Mexico. It is also among the wildest, most dangerous, most beautiful, most macho, most interesting regions of Mexico.

This place is different. Seeing a gringo for the first time, village children break into tears; Tzotzil women stroll around barefoot in bright, traditional clothing; tourists get stoned to death for taking pictures in a church; no-nonsense *bandidos* occasionally roam the streets.

High in the mountains of central Chiapas, San Cristobal is a place for adventure. And, while a little risky to explore, few places are as interesting at night. Down the alleys and into the dark are Mayan Indians conducting bizarre religious ceremonies, musicians whooping it up and getting out of control on home-brewed *huitepec*, *bandidos* fighting over possession of a horse.

Also, hardly a week goes by in San Cristobal without some kind of religious festival — many get very wild. Don't be surprised to see priests running through fires or men singing and dancing in monkey-skin hats when you arrive.

To get there, fly to Mexico City, then get a round-trip ticket (about \$175) on a domestic airline to Tuxtla Gutierrez. If \$175 is too expensive, you can always get on a bus, although from Mexico City the trip may take two full days for the 425-mile trip.

From Tuxtla, you can hitchhike the 32 miles to San Cristobal. In this area, it is likely the *majority* of people heading your direction will stop; use a little caution, however — if the ride looks suspicious, say you're waiting for a ride to Chicago or something.

Once you're in San Cristobal, go to the Posada El Candil, two blocks west of Iglesia de Santa Domingo. A room with shared bath is about \$6 a night. Food stalls are everywhere, and you can eat well for a few dollars a day.

La Avellana y San Jose, Guatemala

Your ride drops you off. You find a bungalow on the beach. You walk to the nearby village. You eat a coconut. You drink a local brew. You send a telegram to your boss saying you won't be returning to the States — ever.

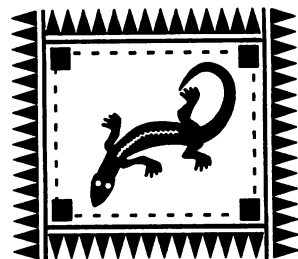
If it could happen anywhere, it could happen at La Avellana, on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala near El Salvador. Volcanic dark-sand beaches, tropical birds, thatched bamboo cabanas, sprawling jungle foliage, broiled seafood, cheap coconuts and fruits, and excellent surf, are everywhere.

If you get tired of all this, you can always roam up to San Jose to take a few steps on the wild side. The classic sun-baked, tropical seaport, San Jose's dirt streets are lined with rotting shacks and hundreds of raunchy sailors' bars. Panting dogs lie in the middle of the road snapping lazily at flies, pigs and chickens scavenge for food in piles of garbage, old men squat in front of cantinas watching and saying nothing.

Noisy, drunken sailors move from bar to bar, each as dimly lit as the next, with slow-moving fans, blasting jukeboxes, faded colors and exotic-sounding names. Rum, *aguardiente*, and beer, hard-working houses of ill repute, fistfights in the streets — San Jose is a place where anything can happen (and usually does). Wild adventure hangs heavy in the town's humid air.

There are several places to stay around La Avellana; many places offer a bungalow and hammock for \$4 a night. A run-down hotel room in San Jose

"You send
a telegram to
your boss
saying you won't be
returning to the States — ever."



goes for about \$7 a night (reptiles extra).

After flying into Guatemala City, you can hop a bus to the coast from the terminal in Zona 4, or hitch a ride from the outskirts of the city on Highway CA9. This highway leads straight to San Jose, 43 miles away. From San Jose, La Avellana is about 20 miles east on Highway CA2.

To enter Guatemala, you'll need a valid passport and a tourist card. It's best to get the card at a Guatemalan consulate before you go, as it can be a hassle getting one at the immigration office after landing.

Parque Nacional Chirripo, Costa Rica

Why go to a place with 9,171 species of vascular plants, 208 species of mammals, 852 species of birds, 151 species of amphibians, 224 species of reptiles, 35,493 species of insects, 700,000-plus species of butterflies and 139 species of freshwater fish?

Are you serious?

This is the camping trip to end all camping trips. Unfortunately, after returning, you may never be able to have a good time camping in the United States again.

Chirripo is it. On your 10-hour trek to the top of Chirripo peak (12,529 feet), passing by glacial lakes, waterfalls, rivers, mixed forests, fern groves and swamps, you can see margays, pumas, ocelots, tapirs and quetzals (yes, quetzals). Bring warm clothing, all the camping gear you will need for your stay, and some good legs. Because this is a camping trip, you won't need to be concerned about staying in Costa Rican cabanas or hotels, which tend to be expensive (upwards of \$15 a night). Also, the *ticos* (Costa Ricans) encourage camping in their parks, so you'll have no problem staying in the bush.

The entrance to Chirripo is 9 miles northeast of San Isidro; 94 miles southeast of San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica. A bus can get you there for a couple bucks.

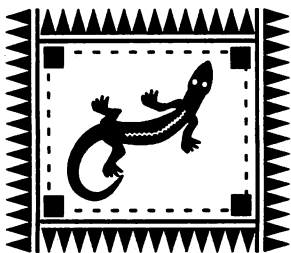
Citizens of the United States can enter Costa Rica with just a tourist card and a driver's license; a passport is not necessary, but may be helpful when changing money. Tourist cards can be obtained from Costa Rican consulates or most airlines that fly into the country.

All you need to do now is pick an adventure destination and begin packing. All sorts of airfare deals are out there to get you to where you want to go. Get in touch with the airlines and travel agencies and search for the best price.

Airfare will be the most expensive part of your trip. Once the plane touches down, no more than \$200 will be necessary to stay for a couple of weeks in any of the above places. (Take an additional \$200 for emergencies.)

More important than cost, however, you will return to the States with a smile, a smile you simply wouldn't be able to get by dancing in a stupid resort with the same people you were trying to get away from in the first place.

Buena aventuras, hombres. ✂



EXCLUSIVE:

Flying In The Belly Of The Beast

SOF Counts Coup With Polish Hind

Text & Photos by Tom Bates



TACTICAL air support for the 6th Pomeranian Airborne Assault Brigade and for Poland's other ground forces comes largely in the form of the dreaded Soviet Mi-24 Hind D. And the unit responsible for flying these monsters is the 56th Assault Helicopter Squadron stationed in Inowroclaw, in north-central Poland.

SOF was the first Western media source to ever lay eyes on this squadron base, to talk with its pilots, examine the training facilities, and to be taken on a white-knuckle evasive-action ride in the nose of one of their prized Soviet Mi-24 Hind Ds by their country's best pilot.

From Afghanistan to Nicaragua, over the years plenty of SOF correspondents have been on the receiving end of Soviet Hinds. Finally, we're able to show what this famous helicopter looks like from the pilot's perspective. Though not as life-threatening, the perspective from the gunner's seat is no less awe-inspiring.

Before being taken for the ride of my life, I spoke with the 56th Squadron's commander, Janusz Tomczyk, about his squadron and about the helicopters they fly.

Founded and designated as the 1st Chopper Squadron in 1963, its original role was simply recon and logistical supply. During the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the squadron provided this type of support for Polish forces inside Czechoslovakia, and helped insert the 6th Pomeranian Airborne Assault Division during the earliest part of that invasion.

In 1977, armaments were mounted on their helicopters and the squadron's name and mission were formally changed to reflect its new air assault capabilities. While theoretically assigned to assist any Polish military unit, the 56th Squadron trains closely with the 6th Pomeranian Brigade, and with the counter-terrorist forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Pilots from the 56th have also trained foreign helicopter pilots, the last assignment being in Libya in 1984.

Mines From the Sky

In addition to providing recon, logistical, fire and antiarmor air support, the 56th Assault Helicopter Squadron also trains in aerial disbursement of antipersonnel and antiarmor mines. These mines

are either individually para-dropped or electronically discharged from Soviet-made 24-tube mine launchers. In either instance they are dropped from a height of 100 meters. When I asked about the infamous "butterfly" antipersonnel mines used by the Soviets in Afghanistan (I brought along a picture of one from a back issue of SOF), the commander claimed no knowledge of such mines.

Combat training for Mi-24 pilots takes three years, with a compulsory 150 hours of flight time required on the squadron's Mi-2 Hips before advancing to the Mi-24. Once trained on the Mi-24, pilots need only a minimum of 40 hours per year of flight time to maintain their combat-ready status. The squadron's vice commander and commander must log a minimum of 100 hours per year, compared to U.S. helicopter pilots who need a minimum of 250 hours per year to remain on active flight status. Flight crews are also trained to be interchangeable — anyone aboard during a mission should be able to pilot the Mi-24, so pilots can be changed during flight in case of injury. Poland's pilots have a mandatory retirement age of 50.



Soviet-built Mi-24 Hind D helicopters land at 56th Air Assault Squadron field at Inowroclaw, Poland.



The commander was insistent that I tell his American counterparts how lucky they are: "I make U.S. \$150 per month," he joked. "And unlike in America, there is virtually no civilian market in Poland for trained helicopter pilots. Our pilots give all new meaning to

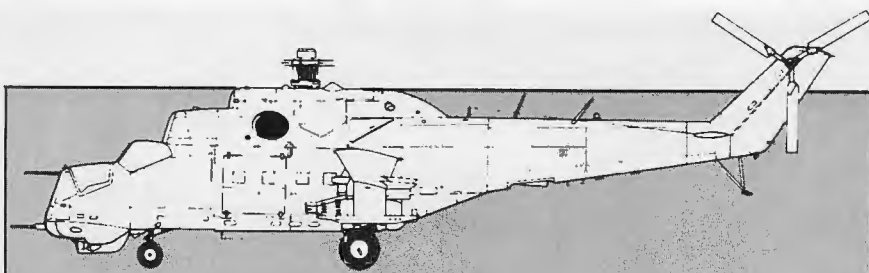
Gunner's perspective of Polish countryside, as seen from nose of Hind D.

the phrase 'once in, never out.' We're here because we love to fly ... because we have to love to fly to enter such a dead-end profession ... we can't afford to leave!"

I then asked the commander some

specifics about the Mi-24 — what he likes and dislikes about it, how he thinks it compares with the Apache. He replied, "In terms of avionics and maneuverability, the Apache is far superior to the Mi-24. In my opinion, the Mi-24 is too heavy, and the plexiglass nose is too vulnerable to ground fire. The Soviets learned this in Afghanistan. As for weaponry, I'll take the Mi-24 over the Apache any time. I can't imagine being able to direct anything like the Mi-24's massive destructive power on a single target with another helicopter. American smart weapons are certainly nice, but if I were on the ground and had to choose between having to withstand an attack from an Apache or an Mi-24, I'd most fear the Mi-24. That is, unless I had one of your Stingers resting on my shoulder. Then I'd be ready to take on a Bear bomber."

Following his reference to the Stinger, I asked whether the Soviets had passed on any tips on how to effectively evade it, based on their experience in Afghanistan.



THE MI-24 HIND D

The Soviet Hind D resulted from an extensive redesign of the Mi-24 Hind A, which was undertaken to correct faults that became apparent after the Hind A was deployed. Only some 500 Hind As were produced, but since the mid-1970s the Hind D was exported to every country of the late Warsaw Pact except Romania, and a cheapened version designated the Mi-25 has been exported to Soviet client states all over the world.

Retaining the rotor head, transmission and basic airframe of the A, the D features a redesigned nose section that seats the gunner well below the pilot in a stepped, tandem cockpit for improved visibility. The gunner's cockpit has parallel controls that enable the gunner to fly the craft if necessary.

The entire nose section, which now mounts an 800 rpm, four-barrel, 12.7mm "Gatling," is heavily armored, including armored seats, anti-fragmentation cock-

pit lining, and armor glass windshields and canopies. The redesigned nose also incorporates more sophisticated sensors, instrumentation, and sighting equipment, including FLIR (forward-looking infrared) and LLTV (low-light television) to give the Mi-24 D enhanced night-fighting ability.

Fifty-six feet long, with rotors of nearly the same length, an empty Mi-24 weighs 18,500 pounds, with a maximum loaded weight of 24,250 pounds. Two 2,200 hp TV3-117 turboshaft engines give the Mi-24 a maximum speed of 185 mph and a range of 198 miles. Its service ceiling is 14,765 feet.

In addition to the 12.7mm "Gatling" in the nose, the Mi-24 Hind D carries four Swatter (AT-2) antitank missiles, and the four under-wing pylons can mount rocket pods, bombs or other ordnance.

A modified (stripped) Mi-24 designated the A-10 holds the land speed record for such craft. — D. McLean

in a very frantic voice. When I asked what he had communicated with the tower he pointed up to the sky and laughingly replied, "Your satellites. They see and hear everything we do. Whenever any of our pilots makes a less than perfect landing or some other mistake, we make sure to radio the control tower and give some excuse about a bad cross wind or something. We hope your intel people are listening in, so they'll think the mistake wasn't our fault!"

Hind Joy Ride

Then came what I'd been waiting for — my ride in the nose of a Hind. "You'll be the first Westerner to have this experience," shouted Commander Tomczyk over the roar of the Hind engines. "We don't want you to forget it."

With this introduction, he explained that Poland's finest Hind pilot, Major Mirosław Bedlinski, was going to take me aloft. "Remember when I told you there's really no way to get away from a Stinger? That wasn't entirely true. There's one pilot who could do it. He's known throughout Poland as 'Rodeo.' He can make an Mi-24 do things it probably wasn't designed to do. I've told him to take you on an escape-and-evasion run that he has designed himself, in a Hind that our people have modified for him ... that is, if you think you can stomach it," Tomczyk explained.

The gauntlet was thrown down. Refuse? N-n-n-not me! Major Bedlinski approached me in his black flight suit with an enormous shit-eating grin plastered on his face. He extended his hand in greeting, then before I could grab it, he put me in a friendly head lock and gave me an American-style "noogy" with the knuckles of his clenched fist. "I saw that in an American movie once," he shouted.

He then climbed into his pilot's seat. Three ground support crewmen strapped me into the nose of the Hind and, big smiles on their faces, made the sign of the cross before closing the plexiglass bubble over me. Thirty seconds later we were airborne, heading in a full-throttle vertical climb.

What happened for the next 45 minutes defies description. Suffice it to say that Maj. Bedlinski threw me around so much that at one point I fell out of my seat harness, cut my forehead on the small oscillating fan mounted on the windshield, and bruised my back as I smashed against one of the bombardier's sights. Luckily, I did manage to get some good photos from the bombardier's perspective. In so doing, I couldn't help calling to mind the many Afghan mujahideen who'd been caught in the crosshairs of this awesome war machine.

High-Quality Death Machine

Despite the air acrobatics thrown by

"No changes in pilot training or electronic countermeasures were given us by the Soviets," Tomczyk replied, "but that doesn't mean they didn't institute any changes among their own people. The Soviets like to keep new training techniques, new technologies to themselves. We've developed our own evasive action maneuvers in light of what we've heard about the Stinger — erratic nap-of-the-earth flying at 5 to 10 meters between canyons and around buildings. This gives our pilots some excellent training in handling their helicopters under pressure. But realistically, the only way to avoid being downed by a Stinger is to join the infantry!"

We're Our Own Country Now

Before heading out to the airfield, Tomczyk took me on a tour of the squadron's living quarters and of the two classroom facilities (also located in the barracks building) used for helicopter radio crew training. As with the barracks I toured at the 6th Pomeranian Airborne Assault Brigade in Krakow a few days earlier, all evidence of former association with the Soviet Union or Marxist-Leninist ideology had been removed, permanently, according to Tomczyk. "We're our own country now, with an independent government and independent military. Before, the Soviets wouldn't allow us to adopt Western-style mascots and slogans to identify our military units. Now we're

free do this sort of thing. The Warsaw Pact is a corpse propped up for international public display by the Soviets. In reality, the Pact as a viable alliance, political or military, is nonexistent."

The commander went on to say that the squadron has no flight simulators for training pilots. The classroom training I saw was designed exclusively for radio operators. The one room that looked like a foreign-language instruction facility — with troops sitting at desks wearing headsets and an instructor at the head of the class operating a tape recorder and monitoring student performance on receiving and sending messages — was for introductory radio communications instruction. A second classroom with no windows and an elaborate sound and lighting system was for the second advanced phase of communications training.

At Tomczyk's signal, the room came alive with flashing lights, smoke, and ear-splitting combat sounds played on the sound system. "This gives our radiomen a feeling of what performing under combat conditions is like. We train them under these conditions for as long as eight hours at a time, so they learn to work under pressure."

After this, we headed by car out to the airfield. Pilot training begins with hands-on flying in Soviet Mi-2 Hips. Tomczyk himself took me on a 20-minute flight in one of these trainers to give me an aerial view of the complete squadron air facility. After completing a rather rough landing, he immediately radioed the control tower



ABOVE: Soviet Hip trainer at 56th Air Assault Squadron, Inowroclaw. Left to right are Sqdn. Comdr. Janusz Tomczyk, SOF correspondent Tom Bates, Polish army escort Maj. Stanislaw Ruskowski. Photo: Bartek Zborski



Aerial view of 56th Air Assault Squadron airfield, Inowroclaw, Poland.

Maj. Bedlinski, the Mi-24 exhibited very low vibration and was not the rattle-trap I'd come to expect from other Soviet vehicles. This machine was tight and stable — I had no difficulty keeping a steady position on the headrests and eye cups of the gun sights. The Soviets obviously have no trouble with quality control when it comes to weapons of mass destruction.

Before departing the 56th Assault Helicopter Squadron in Inowroclaw, Tomczyk expressed his interest in joining the 6th Pomeranian Airborne Assault Brigade to be hosts for a *Soldier of Fortune* Convention or jump tour. "We're proud of our training and our people. We've been

cut off too long from the West. Americans have always been the idols of Poland's people. Colonel Brown at SOF certainly heads that list. It would be an honor to host an event with your magazine. Poland isn't Las Vegas, but we promise to make your visit worthwhile."

These candid words were anathema just months ago. Of all the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, Poland is far and away the most pro-Western in general, and decidedly pro-American in particular. For instance, Oliver North is widely regarded as a hero among civilians and military personnel alike.

I hope the United States does not miss Poland's Top Gun Hind jockey, Maj. Mirosław Bedlinski, chauffeur for SOF correspondent's thrill-a-minute demonstration ride in Hind D.



ABOVE: SOF correspondent Bates in gunner's seat of Soviet Hind just before takeoff. Photo: Bartek Zborski

this opportunity to forge some sort of alliance with Poland. SOF opened the door for this opportunity. Let's make sure the door stays open.

Tom Bates, a former editor at SOF, is now president of Profit, an international magazine serving emergent Eastern European entrepreneurs. ✎

Legendary Weapon of Navy SEALs

Vietnam, 1969. "Willie" Wilson, a member of Hotel Platoon, SEAL Team One, with his Stoner 63A equipped with left-hand feed mechanism and 150-round drum-type belt carrier. Photo: courtesy Darryl Wilson and Gary Abrahamson



STONER'S SUPER

63

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

THE Viet Cong (VC) called them devils with green faces; their middle names were almost always Stoner; they evolved from U.S. Navy Underwater Demolition Teams (UDTs). They're the U.S. Navy's Sea, Air, Land commandos (SEALs).

In Vietnam they capitalized on the element of surprise, superb intelligence assets and fire superiority to raid VC strongholds, stage ambushes, capture prisoners and supplies and generally create havoc in Charlie's rear areas. Most often, they gained superiority of fire with their Stoner 63(A) machine-guns.

Although few in number and unfortunately never viewed as anything more than a local tactical asset, three SEALs won the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War. Naval special warfare units suffered only 48 KIA while inflicting several thousand confirmed kills on the VC. The only group to ever employ the Stoner 63(A) in significant quantities, the SEALs created a mystique about this fascinating weapon system far out of proportion to the small number manufactured.

An ex-Marine, Eugene M. Stoner is arguably our nation's most prolific and imaginative modern military small arms designer. While associated with Armalite as chief engineer, Stoner was responsible for the design of the AR15/M16, the caliber 7.62x51mm NATO AR-10 battle rifle (small quantities of which were sold to Nicaragua, Sudan, Burma and Portugal), the AR-5 caliber .22 Hornet bolt-action rifle adopted by the U.S. Air Force as the MA-1 survival rifle and the blow-

back-operated AR-7 "Explorer" take down rifle. Stoner's prototype projects included a bolt-action sniping rifle (AR-1), a semiautomatic 7.62x51mm rifle (AR-3) and a 12 gauge shotgun with an aluminum bore and receiver (AR-9).

After leaving Armalite, Stoner developed what was at that time a revolutionary concept for a weapons system to be built around certain basic components that could be transformed into a rifle, carbine or various machine gun configurations by fitting different barrels, feed mechanisms, trigger systems and other parts to the basic assembly.

Through his acquaintance with Howard Carson, who was in charge of the West Coast plant of Cadillac Gage in Costa Mesa, California (where Armalite was located), he convinced the company's president, Russell Baker, that the project was feasible. Cadillac Gage established a small arms development center in Costa Mesa, to which Stoner brought his two principal aides at Armalite, Robert Fremont and James L. Sullivan (who later went on to design the Ultimex 100 SAW for Chartered Industries of Singapore).

A Stoner Is Born

The first working prototype was completed in 1962. Called the Stoner M69W (for no other reason than when turned upside down it reads the same—obviously to symbolize the receiver's inversion to assemble different configurations), it was chambered for the 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge. A second prototype was fabricated and named the Stoner 62. Only these two specimens were

produced before it was decided to focus instead on the 5.56x45mm NATO cartridge, as it appeared the smaller round would soon predominate the small arms arena.

At that time the name was again changed to Stoner 63. No more than 200 guns were produced at the Costa Mesa facility when manufacture was transferred to the Cadillac Gage (a subsidiary of the Ex-Cello-O Corporation) plant in Warren, Michigan. By 1967, NWM (*Nederlandsche Wapen-En Munitiefabriek*) de Kruithoorn N.V. of 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands, was licensed to produce the Stoner 63 system with rights to sell the weapon in all countries of the world outside of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. NWM never fabricated more than a few prototypes. By the end of the decade the Stoner 63's all too brief production life had all but ended.

The complete Stoner 63 system was demonstrated to the U.S. Marines at Quantico in August and September of 1963. They were impressed and favorably inclined toward the rifle and light machine gun configurations. What happened next was



Stoner 63A in the top-fed automatic rifle (AR), or so-called "Bren," configuration. An interesting concept, as magazine-fed machine guns provide a substantial number of advantages over belt guns in certain tactical roles, it was never fielded.

an example of inter-service military politics and deceit at its very worst.

The Army Material Command, upon whom the Marine Corps depended for logistical support, offered to perform the trials on the Stoner system at their test facilities. As they were with Stoner's AR-10, U.S. Army Ordnance personnel were predisposed against the Stoner 63 from day one. In any event, toward the end of the Stoner 63 trials, they were already bound and determined to adopt the bullpup-configuration Rodman Laboratory, Rock Island Arsenal, Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) chambered for the 6mm XM732 cartridge developed at Frankford Arsenal.

By an incredibly strange coincidence the Stoner 63 trials were scheduled to be held at Rodman Laboratory. Equally suspicious was the fact that one of the



Stoner 63 test project managers was also involved in the 6mm Rodman Laboratory bullpup program up to his ears. The Marines were informed that any small arms system, including of course the Stoner 63, should be able to function reliably with ammunition exhibiting an extremely wide range of port pressures. This was, of course, untrue, unrealistic and blatantly unfair and thus the Stoner 63's Mean Rounds Between Stoppages (MRBS) and Mean Rounds Between Failures (MRBF) — critical criteria in the test and evaluation of any military small arms system — were “demonstrated” to be unacceptable.

The tracer ammunition used to sabotage the Stoner 63 trials was of such low port pressure that it would not even function reliably in the M16. Stoner was eventually invited to submit the Stoner 63 chambered for the 6mm XM732 cartridge. He wisely advised Cadillac Gage to decline.

Six Guns In One

The Stoner 63 system was composed of six weapons, all constructed from the basic receiver group: 1) fixed machine gun, 2) light machine gun (LMG), belt-fed, 3) automatic rifle (AR), magazine-fed, 4) medium machine gun (MMG), 5) assault rifle and 6) carbine.

The belt-fed fixed machine gun was the lightest (10.4 lbs.) and smallest (30.4

Firing Stoner 63A with left-hand feed mechanism and 150-round drum-type belt carrier. There is very little perceived recoil and hit probability is quite high if the operator exercises proper fire discipline.

inches in overall length) weapon of its type ever produced. Intended to be mounted in either vehicles or helicopters, either singly or in tandem, it could be fired by hand or, with the trigger group removed, remotely-actuated through a trigger-linkage by a solenoid, cable or pneumatic system. The weight of both the gun and its ammunition are not overriding considerations when they are mounted in a vehicle or aircraft. Weapons of .30 caliber or larger provide greater range and penetration. To my knowledge, this configuration of the Stoner 63 system was never employed in combat.

The MMG was little more than the left-hand, belt-fed light machine gun mounted on a tripod with the buttstock removed. A cradle adapter was fabricated to attach the gun to the U.S. M2/122 tripod (originally designed for the M1918A4 .30 caliber Browning machine gun). The body of the adapter was machined from aluminum, then black anodized. A standard M2 pintle and T&E mechanism were attached. A steel pin on the front of

the adapter fits into a hole drilled into the underside of the U-shaped barrel bracket attached to the gun's gas cylinder. Steel, spring-loaded hooks and latches, screwed and pinned to the rear end of the adapter, were fixed to steel pins welded to the receiver sides. These adapters are quite rare and there is no evidence the Stoner was ever employed as an MMG — undoubtedly for the same reasons that precluded its use as a fixed gun. With the tripod and cradle adapter, the total weight in this configuration is 29 lbs.

The magazine-fed automatic rifle, often referred to as the “Bren” configuration, weighs only 10.2 lbs. Because it is top-fed, both the front and rear sights are offset to the left. As a consequence, in addition to the magazine-well with rear sight that replaces the belt feed mechanism, a special barrel is required. There was little interest in this configuration either — a pity as magazine-fed LMGs, battle-proven in the case of the Bren, provide a substantial number of advantages over belt guns in certain tactical roles.

The belt-fed LMG is the Stoner 63 configuration most often associated with the U.S. Navy SEALs. Weighing only 11.9 lbs., empty (compared to 15.5 lbs. for the M249 SAW), with an overall length of 40.25 inches, it could be fired from the prone position with a bipod, offhand or from the hip. The latter position was

FIELD STRIPPING A STONER

employed all too frequently by the SEALs who would send long bursts downrange with poor hit probability.

As all of the above configurations are fed ammunition from the top, it is required that the basic receiver group be oriented with the gas cylinder to the bottom so that the reciprocating parts do not interfere with the feed mechanisms. They all fire from the open-bolt position and in full-auto mode only (the selector lever is inoperative in these configurations).

Both the assault rifle and carbine fire from the closed-bolt position and are bottom-fed. Thus the receiver group must be inverted with the gas cylinder above the barrel. They are both selective-fire weapons. The rifle, used to some extent by the SEALs in Vietnam, weighs 7.9 lbs., empty, with an overall length identical to the LMG. To convert the assault rifle to a carbine it is only required to replace the 20-inch rifle barrel with the 15.7-inch carbine barrel and change the rigid buttstock for a folding type. This drops the weight to 7.7 lbs. and reduces the overall length to 26.75 inches with the stock folded.

Early factory literature shows the Stoner 63 with all wood furniture. Black and white spacers between the rubber buttpad and stock provide a somewhat sporting appearance. However, the wooden pistol grips and buttstocks were quickly replaced by black polycarbonate components. The handguard remained wood, but was painted black.

Rush To Vietnam

By the time the Stoner 63 was rushed into the Vietnam War by the SEALs, it was barely beyond the prototype stage. Battlefield experience and tests by the Marines, Army and Air Force indicated a number of modifications were required. Shortly after serial number 2,000 was produced, substantial alterations were introduced and the name was changed to Stoner 63A.

Improvements included a one-piece buttstock pad, a 17-4 PH stainless steel gas cylinder, polycarbonate forearm with sling swivel, increased barrel life (from 8,000 to 30,000 rounds) through additional hardening processes, a sling attaching ring at the front end of the carrying handle rod to permit carry at the "ready" position, an investment-cast feed tray, an improved feed cover, a spring-loaded actuator roller to prevent damage to the feed mechanism if the feed cover is closed with the bolt group forward, a longer retracting handle, improved bipod and smaller ammunition boxes. The rifle and carbine's magazine-well was extended and flared to facilitate magazine insertion and the cocking handle was placed on top of the receiver to permit charging with either hand. A wire folding stock with polyvinyl chloride coating and only 14 parts replaced the carbine's previous polycarbonate folding buttstock (all told nine different types of folding

FOR all its complexity, disassembly procedures for field stripping the Stoner 63A are relatively simple. Engage the safety. Lift the top cover and remove the belt. With the bolt retracted, inspect the chamber and make sure the weapon is clear. Close the top cover. Disengage the safety and move the reciprocating parts forward, under control.

Push the captive take-down pin to the right as far as it will go. Pivot the trigger housing group downward. Withdraw the recoil spring and guide rod out the rear of the receiver. Lift the muzzle and drop out the piston/bolt carrier group. Unscrew and remove the trigger housing pivot pin assembly and separate this group from the receiver. Unscrew and remove the feed mechanism pivot pin assembly. Push forward on the top cover latch. Raise the top cover and remove it and the feed tray from the receiver. Unscrew and remove the forearm pivot pin assembly and remove the forearm. Depress the barrel latch and remove the barrel. Pull back on the retracting handle until its lug and disassembly notch are aligned with the notch on the receiver. Pull out and down on the retracting handle to separate it from the receiver.

Push against the base of the firing pin until it is flush with the back carrier cap assembly. While holding the firing pin in this position, rotate the carrier cap assembly (with the piston oriented down and to the front) a quarter turn counter-clockwise while also pressing down on the actuator roller until it is in line with the bottom of the bolt carrier. Use a work bench as a fulcrum as it is difficult to rotate the carrier cap assembly. Remove the firing pin. Push the bolt into the carrier and remove its cam pin. Withdraw the bolt from the carrier.

Under no circumstances should you attempt to separate the carrier cap assembly from the bolt carrier body. The Belleville washers inside the carrier were installed by means of a hydraulic press and calibration gages. If you drive out the roll pin and two notched pins retaining the carrier cap assembly, you can kiss your ass goodbye, as you'll never be able to reassemble these parts.

Push out the stock retaining pin to separate the buttstock from the trigger housing group. To disassemble the trigger housing group, you must first push in the lock plate tang on the left side of the housing and slide the lock plate forward. Push out the trigger housing cover pin and remove the trigger housing cover. Push out the trigger pins and remove the trigger, sear and sear spring. Remove the lock plate. Remove the safety by sliding it to the rear and dropping it down through the trigger guard. When re-assembling these parts, the trigger pins must be aligned perfectly so their notches will engage the lock plate.

The gas regulator can be removed by rotating it until the flat side exposes the roll pin. Then push the regulator out from the left side.

After cleaning, lubricate and reassemble in reverse order. Do not lubricate the gas cylinder, piston head or gas regulator.

Note: Do not "play" with the take-down pin while there is a belt in the feed mechanism and the bolt is retracted. If it is pushed out by mistake, with the 150-round belt carrier attached, the receiver and trigger housing will separate just enough so the bolt will override the sear, but not enough for the recoil spring and guide rod to fly out the rear. The result will be an uncontrolled runaway burst. A SEAL was killed in Vietnam while he sat in a boat with the muzzle pointed at his chest and accidentally pushed out the take-down pin. Any number of weapons will fire if this procedure is followed and this is hardly a defect in the Stoner 63A. Nevertheless, three modifications were made to the subsequent XM207E1 prototype-only Stoner to prevent accidental discharge of this type.

— P.G.K.



Stoner 63A LMG, completely disassembled. Operators should never disassemble the bolt carrier components as shown here as the Belleville washers are installed with a hydraulic press.

stocks were produced at one time or another in varying quantities).

There were also a number of major alterations. The "SAFE" position was removed from the selector lever and a safety mechanism of the M1 Garand/M-14 type installed in a slot in the front of the trigger guard. As the new trigger guard was welded to the trigger housing and could not be removed, a winter trigger attachment was eventually designed. The selector lever's "SEMI" and "AUTO" positions were placed in 180 degree juxtaposition to preclude confusion under stress.

A carbon-relief groove was cut inside the gas cylinder to permit firing over longer periods of time without maintenance. A three-position gas regulator was added to the machine gun barrel's gas block. A spring-loaded ejection-port dust cover was added.

To understand the importance of these changes and the brilliance of the overall design, a detailed examination of the Stoner 63A's salient features is required. The basic component group consists of the receiver, gas cylinder, bolt and piston group, recoil spring group and trigger housing.

The receiver body is a long rectangular steel pressing with support structures, the gas cylinder and other appurtenances (i.e., trigger housing and feed mechanism retaining brackets, tripod studs, forearm bracket and barrel latching mechanism) welded in place. The rear portion holds the piston extension and bolt group. The front portion holds the piston and barrel and is ventilated to reduce weight and improve heat dispersion. The ejection port is on the right side when the receiver is inverted for the rifle and carbine and on the left side in the machine gun configurations. The "Endurion"® finish appears to be some type of black baked enamel over phosphate.

The open-bolt-firing trigger mechanism

is quite simple. There are four so-called trigger pins. The front pin retains either a flapper-type magazine catch/lease (used with the rifle/carbine and left-hand-feed 150-round drum-type belt carrier), a full dust cover (used with the top-fed AR or vertically mounted ammo box on either belt-fed system) or a half size dust cover

(used with the right-hand-feed bottom box carrier). The next two pins hold the timer and hammer, both of which components are deleted in the open-bolt guns. The fourth pin is the trigger's axis shaft. The spring-loaded sear pivots on the selector lever's axis shaft. The selector lever's position is of no consequence when firing from the open bolt. The sliding safety blocks all trigger movement when pushed to the rear. The rear of the

trigger housing serves as the receiver's end cap and holds the buttstock. The black polycarbonate pistol

grip has a small checkered area on each side and is flared at the bottom to prevent the operator's hand from sliding downward. There is a storage compartment in the grip, sealed by a hinged cover with a spring-loaded hatch.

The hooked, steel retracting handle is normally mounted along the right side of the

receiver. Non-reciprocating, it has 24 lightning holes and when pulled rearward

engages a projection on the piston to draw the piston/bolt group back to the cocked position. After retraction of the operating group it should be pushed fully forward so a flat-spring latch riveted to the front end can engage a slotted plate welded to the front of the receiver. It is somewhat dif-

ficult to operate when the right-hand feed mechanism with bottom box carrier is installed, so a special slotted forearm with a bottom cocking handle was devised. SEALs in Vietnam often added an extended handle to this apparatus.

Five-Barrel System

Five different barrels are associated with the Stoner 63A system. In addition to the rifle, carbine and AR barrel (with offset front sight), there are two types of machine gun barrels — a standard heavy barrel and a short "commando" tube. The standard machine gun and AR heavy barrels are 20 inches in length (bolt face to muzzle). Add another 1.67 inches for the flash hider.

The fluted, so-called "commando" barrel with a length of 15.7 inches was sometimes employed by the SEALs. However, the gas port is almost at the muzzle and since port pressure drops to zero as soon as the bullet leaves the barrel very little energy reserve is retained. Even though the port diameter was increased, this merely resulted in faster initial acceleration of the piston and operation was never totally reliable. (Note: This problem was also encountered by FN when they developed the first short-barreled "para" FAL. They were eventually forced to lengthen the barrel.)

All Stoner 63(A) barrels are of the quick-change type. The front of the barrel rests on a U-shaped barrel bracket attached to the gas cylinder. A spring-loaded (with two nested coil springs) barrel latch on the receiver drives a steel pin into a hole in the barrel socket to hold the barrel firmly in place. When the bolt is retracted, the barrel can be removed by pressing down on the latch and pulling the barrel forward.

The front sight assemblies of these barrels, as well as the bayonet lug, are mounted to the gas block and feature a round post with protective ears, adjustable for windage and elevation zero. The bird-cage flash hider has six oval ports. There are carrying handles on the AR and standard machine gun barrels that can be snapped into any one of three positions. The black-painted wooden handles are attached to a steel rod by a roll pin. The entire assembly can be removed from the barrel, if desired.

There are three split-ring valves on the gas plugs of these barrels. While they appear similar to those on the M16's bolt, they are not interchangeable. Furthermore, they are static and serve only to seal the gas cylinder, while those on the M16 are dynamic (i.e., they reciprocate with the

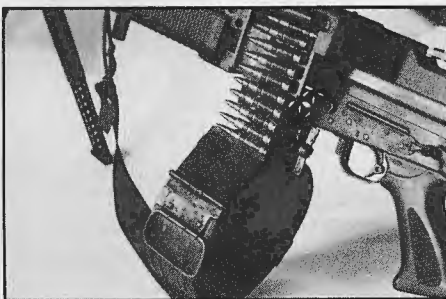


When the cradle adapter is used to fire the Stoner 63A from the M2 Browning machine gun tripod, the group dispersion is very low. However, there is no evidence the weapon was ever employed in this manner, as weapons of .30 caliber or larger provide greater range and penetration and are to be preferred when weight is not an overriding consideration.



Produced only in small quantities, this 250-round drum-type belt carrier — developed at China Lake, California — was too clumsy and heavy.

Combloc RPD LMG drum-type belt carrier jury-rigged to Stoner 63A using the Stoner 150-round belt carrier bracket by enterprising SEALs in Vietnam.



METHOD OF OPERATION

STONER 63A machine guns are gas-operated, rotary-locking, air-cooled, belt- or magazine-fed and fire from the open-bolt position to improve cooling and reduce the possibility of cook-offs. The mechanism is driven by a conventional long-stroke piston (which means that the piston and bolt group travel rearward a distance somewhat greater than the length of the loaded cartridge). Using the bolt's movement to generate energy to lift and feed belted ammunition requires sustained pressure on the piston and increased momentum of the reciprocating parts which would not be provided by the short impulsive blow produced in a direct gas impingement system like that of the M16.

When the trigger is pulled, the piston/bolt group flies forward and a round is stripped from the belt or magazine. The bolt-head has seven symmetrical locking lugs which distribute the firing load evenly around the bolt head and barrel socket. Attached to the piston extension, the bolt carrier has a curved cam path in which the bolt's cam pin (retained by the firing pin) moves. Final forward movement of the piston rotates the bolt through 22 1/2 degree clockwise and the locking lugs engage behind abutments in the barrel socket.

When the carrier cap with the actuator roller (for the belt feed mechanism) at the rear end of the bolt carrier is rotated 180 degrees — required to assemble the bottom-fed rifle and carbine configurations — it also rotates the spring-retracted firing pin by the same amount and orients a small notch on the firing pin to the top. There is a thick, steel flat washer in front of a series of Belleville washers in the bolt carrier's hollow interior. This washer, called the firing pin collar, has a tab which engages a channel in the "bottom" (when the receiver is inverted for the rifle/carbine configuration) of the bolt carrier's interior to preserve its orientation. The hole in the center of this unusual washer is cut flat at the top (called a "D" hole). The notch on the spring-loaded firing pin permits it to move rearward past the "D" hole in the firing pin collar an additional sixty five-thousandths of an inch so that it may be driven forward by the hammer. When oriented downward — for firing from the open-bolt position — the firing pin is held forward by that amount and when the bolt rotates into battery and moves into the carrier, the firing pin protrudes from the bolt face to strike the primer. All of this is remarkably ingenious.

Unknown to most, an antibounce device, consisting of a tungsten carbide rod, approximately 4 inches in length, rides within the piston extension's hollow interior and moves forward and aft during the recoil and counter-recoil cycles. This reduces bolt bounce during locking and eliminates the possibility of primer ignition out of battery during closed-bolt firing of the rifle/carbine.

Upon firing, gas following the bullet up the bore is tapped through the barrel's gas port (about 16 inches from the chamber) and into the gas cylinder to drive the piston rearward. This movement is translated to the bolt carrier. There is about 0.2-inch of free travel, to permit gas pressure to drop to safe level, before the carrier's cam path rotates the bolt 22 1/2 degrees counter-clockwise

to unlock. There is no pitch on the locking lugs and so no primary extraction occurs during unlocking. The claw extractor, which has a pivoting fulcrum at its rear end, is retained in the bolt head by a spring-loaded pin. Seated deeply, almost in line with the bolt axis, it alone provides extremely efficient extraction of the empty case as the harder the bolt pulls, the deeper the extractor claw bites into the case's extractor groove. There is an angled channel on the opposite side of the bolt head through which the ejector passes as the bolt group moves rearward. The spring-loaded ejector is fixed to the front feed-mechanism/trigger housing bracket by a roll pin.

After extraction and ejection, the carrier continues rearward to compress the recoil spring on its guide rod (located in the receiver body to permit removal and changing of the buttstock for the different configurations).

Another unique feature is the buffer system within the bolt carrier. In front of the carrier cap are a steel shim and a set of 27 saucer-shaped Belleville washers which absorb piston energy by deforming into a flat plate when the bolt carrier strikes the receiver's end cap. When they return to their original shape they release a surge of strain energy which throws the reciprocating parts forward in counter-recoil with a speed only slightly less than the original recoil velocity. These Belleville washers, oriented in opposing sets of three, prevent the gun from literally beating itself to death. Depending upon the cyclic rates employed and the port pressure of the ammunition used, they should last between 40,000 and 50,000 rounds before replacement is required.

AS the piston and bolt group move forward, another round is stripped from the feed mechanism and the cycle repeats until the trigger is released or the ammunition supply is exhausted.

Belt movement is produced by the actuator roller riding in the channeled feed arm. This spring-loaded feed arm rests under the hinged top cover and is pivoted at its rear end. As the bolt reciprocates, the front end of the feed arm moves across the feed tray and operates a lever attached to a single set of spring-loaded feed pawls. The feed pawls move a cartridge and link over the feed tray's spring-loaded stop pawl from where they are next positioned onto the slotted feedway and held firmly in place by a spring-loaded steel plate in the top cover. After the cartridge has been pushed forward out of its link, the empty link is pushed toward the link ejection port which has a spring-loaded dust cover.

— P.G.K.



Stoner 63A LMG with right-hand feed — top cover lifted to expose the feed mechanism.

bolt) and are thus much more subject to wear and damage.

The rifle, carbine and AR barrels have no gas regulator as they are magazine-fed and do not require the energy reserve levels of belt-fed mechanisms. The standard machine gun barrel has a three-position regulator. It can be adjusted by inserting the nose of a bullet into the hole over the regulator's lock detent and pushing down on the detent. Then rotate to the desired setting. The slowest rate of fire is obtained when the narrowest indicator notch is set over the detent. The cyclic rate

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Kuwaiti kids play on abandoned Iraqi tank along main highway leading to Kuwait City.
Photo: Robert K. Brown



“Mac” Dunnigan is the nom de plume of a veteran journalist covering the Gulf War for an American periodical. Dunnigan wasn’t content to sit through endless media briefings and went looking for the war on his own. He met SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown in Riyadh after leaving Kuwait City. They’d both outwitted the military press police and gotten articles from the front. His story follows:

RAFHA is a garrison town 400 clicks west of Hafar al Batin along the Tapline Road. It was there, in the modern airport

terminal building, that the headquarters of the 18th Airborne Corps was located. A friend and I rented a car and drove there, hoping to somehow circumvent the tight leash being kept on the press in Saudi Arabia.

I wrote a letter to Brigadier General Edison Scholes, Chief of Staff of the 18th Airborne Corps, on my own letterhead, put it in a plain brown envelope and addressed it to him.

We drove to the perimeter of the air base, the car decked out with an orange aircraft recognition panel on the roof and upside down Vs on the doors and hood. A

young MP looked at us and said, “Oh, you guys are special operations.” We just sort of nodded.

“Do you know orbit?” he said.

“Huh?” we responded.

“That’s the challenge; you’re supposed to say grammar; that’s the response.” I told him we’d been out of ammo.

“Oh, OK. Well, orbit/grammar is the challenge and response. Tonight at midnight it becomes bear skin/soap box,” he said. Then we drove in. At the inner wire another MP asked what we wanted. We told him we were looking for Gen. Scholes. He said “orbit,” I said “gram-

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Treachery and Deceit
on the Road to Kuwait City

by "Mac" Dunnigan



mar," and he passed us on into the terminal where we told the MPs we had a message for Scholes. We were referred to a senior NCO who looked us up and down and apparently thought we were spooks.

My attire assisted in the deception. I was dressed in desert cammie pants, jungle boots, a khaki shirt and a baseball cap with jump wings on it. No other insignia or rank.

Is That Envelope Secure?

"Shit, sir, you just missed the general. Can you turn the letter over to me or is it something you have to hand carry?" the

NCO asked.

"Well," I said, "I think I can turn it over to you."

"Don't worry, it will be secure," he added. I asked where we could find Colonel Burbank (not his real name). "He is down at Camp Blackjack," the NCO informed us. He then pulled the cover off the situation map and showed us where everything was.

By the time we got to Camp Blackjack about an hour and a half later the word had trickled down from the senior NCO that there were two CIA guys looking around and it was OK for them to travel; they were working for Scholes; whatever assistance they needed was to be provided.

The next day in Rafha an officer I met at 18th Airborne Corps HQ recognized me. "Oh, sir, how are you doing? What can we do for you, sir?"

"Well, I'd like to go to MSR Montana," I told him, and started making up some story. "Hell, I've got two hard-shell Humvees that are going right away. In fact, I will go with you. How far do you want to go?" he said, eager to please.

"How far are you going?" I asked. "We're going at least to Corps artillery." A lieutenant colonel from MI [military intelligence] also went along. His special project was trying to figure out the combat

effectiveness of various units. His job was to compare the reports from units regarding ordnance expended within the first 24 hours, versus what he actually saw. In other words, he goes up to an outfit and looks at their after-action report and compares it with the objective facts (ammo expenditure for example) to see if the two jibe. He had a cameraman with both still and video cameras as well as two hard-shell Humvees.

I rode quite a ways with the lieutenant colonel from MI; the next afternoon we stopped in the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment AO. It was getting late and they were organizing their night perimeter, setting up tents and digging fighting positions. When the MI evaluation team went into a tent for god-knows-what, I wandered over to a large EPW (Enemy Prisoner of War) holding area. "Hello sir," one of the MPs on duty said. "How are you doing? Who are you with?" This prompted an MP sergeant to come over and ask, "Sir, are you supposed to be here?" All I said was, "Eight." To which he responded, "Six. Fine, sir." Another successful con.

I had gotten the new challenge/response from the guys that I drove with the day before. "I understand that bear skin/soap box is going to expire at midnight," I said. "Yes, it's eight and six for the whole AO



Burned-out Iraqi T-62, hit by A-10-fired Maverick antiarmor missile. Wreck was located 40 klicks across border into Kuwait along main highway. Photo: courtesy author

including the entire 18th Corps and 7th Corps," came the answer.

"What can we do for you?" the MP asked. "Well," I said, "when did you get these prisoners?" "We didn't get them. The guys at the 3rd Armored Division captured them and turned them over to us for processing."

Author with American helicopter doorgunner from 3rd Armored Division in U.S.-occupied southern Iraq. Photo: courtesy author



Kuwaiti mechanized infantry rest and eat during three-hour "lunch break." Photo: "Mac" Dunnigan

Interview with Iraqi Tank Commander

I looked straight at an Iraqi prisoner eating his MRE. He saw me and said, "Good morning, oh, I mean good afternoon," in fair English. "Good afternoon," I replied. "Who are you?"

"I am Iraq army captain, armored unit," he responded in accented, but fairly fluent English. At one point he told me his name, which I wrote down, after which he said, "Please don't ever repeat my name. Call me Ibrahim, don't call me captain, just call me something else."

He was very nervous about his name. And he was eating MRE pork! He ate the whole thing, then used the spoon to eat the



Iraqi troops bypassed by lead assault elements surrendered to anyone who would take them. Photo: "Mac" Dunnigan



Author talks with troops from 3rd Armored Division. This unit successfully engaged the Tawakalna Republican Guard Division. Photo: "Mac" Dunnigan



Iraqi-converted BMP "ambulance" abandoned on Kuwaiti highway after A-10s flew over. Note Red Crescent, equivalent to our Red Cross. But also note and 14.5mm HMG. Photo: "Mac" Dunnigan

peanut butter and cocoa powder. "You can add a little water," I told him. "No this is just fine," he said.

He was a senior captain per the Soviet system. In other words, he was half way between captain and major. He'd served on active duty as a university graduate officer since 1983. In the Iran-Iraq War, in 1986, he was wounded in the leg and feet by fragments. He was out for a year-and-a-half and then called back up to active duty toward the end of 1987 and assigned to a newly organized armored division, not Republican Guard, but regular army.

His unit was equipped with renovated T-62s, which had new engines, new guns, new sighting systems, and chemical filter systems. The personnel were trained for a year and half by Soviet advisers. He told me he took part in the final battles of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988.

He was captured that morning at 0740. His battalion consisted of three tank companies and a reserve company of trucks. They were positioned in an area that had been heavily bombed, but somehow all their vehicles were intact. The evening of 25 February, his unit received an alert order to move out and they moved within 10 minutes. Two line companies and a reserve company went someplace. He didn't know where.

His orders were to move north in two columns to a higher terrain feature. Iraqi intelligence told him that a U.S. column of unknown size was moving 10 to 14 kilometers west of their position in a parallel direction. There were wadis in between so they weren't in danger of being cut off. "It was muddy and there was a sand storm as we got under way. My headquarters staff and their comms section rode in two BMPs in the center of the column. I elected to ride in the first tank forward of the command BMP," he told me.

They had come out of Kuwait and were moving alongside a ridge toward the terrain they wanted to occupy, when the communications BMP exploded. A few moments later the lead tank exploded, then the trail tank exploded, then the headquarters BMP exploded.

He was swinging his turret back and forth but could not determine the location of the American forces. He could see nothing. There was no evidence of enemy presence. Then the number two tank exploded from a different munition, which he thought was a main tank round.

He thought he heard a tank gun firing at them, but he couldn't see anything through his acquisition system, which was only effective to 1,000-2,000 meters in a sand storm. He bailed out as everyone else was unassing their vehicles and they all ran to a wadi on their right. As they ran away each of their remaining tanks exploded.

I never asked him how many tanks there were but the MI guy later told me there were probably 14 to a company and two BMPs. Then he said, "How did they shoot



Highway leading from Kuwait City to Iraqi border was known as "the Jackpot" by Coalition pilots due to the extremely "target rich environment." Photo: Robert K. Brown

us so far? How? How did they shoot us so far?" That's the story of one puzzled regular Iraqi army armored company commander that "engaged" the 3rd Armored Division.

Kuwait City or Bust

An MI officer I later talked to said this was typical of the kind of reports he was getting. The Iraqi captain's unit was apparently initially hit by air-launched ordnance — Maverick and Hellfire antitank missiles fired by Apache helicopters and A-10 Thunderbolt II ground support aircraft. The avionics on the A-10's Maverick missiles can acquire targets without positive identification. The Maverick scope inside the cockpit will tell the pilot "Yes, we have a target, yes it's a lock." He pushes the button, and away it goes.

After my conversation with the prisoner, I hitched a ride back to my car and returned to Hafar al Batin. I figured, fuck it, I'm going to drive up to the border and see what's happening. I drove all the way to the border in my car. The next day I slid by the Saudi checkpoints dressed in full desert cammie, including a tan T-shirt, hat, and American flag sewn on my sleeve.

On the Kuwaiti side of the border I linked up with three young Kuwaiti soldiers who had missed their ride. One of them spoke a few words of English. He was from India, but a Kuwaiti citizen, and a member of the Kuwaiti army. I gave them a ride figuring they would provide me with good cover during my efforts to get into Kuwait City. After about 10 kilometers, we encountered Iraqi tank obstacles.

The Iraqis had cut 12- to 14-foot antitank ditches across the multilane highway and studded the cuts with reinforced concrete pylons known as dragon's teeth. Combat engineers had filled in some of the cuts and flattened the

dragon's teeth.

Where the cuts hadn't been filled we had to drive off the road, down and around. These bypasses had been chewed up so bad by trucks and tracked vehicles that we got stuck a couple of times in my two-wheel drive car. We had to stay in the ruts, because between the ruts and outside of them there were mines that looked like 6-ounce beer cans sticking out of the sand. Further out we could see antiarmor mines sticking out of the sand in several places — a fact that made me somewhat nervous.

There were about 20 belts of obstacles. After that the road turned more or less east-northeast and was uncut. We could see a large minefield in the direction we were driving. When we got to the minefield there was a U.S. Army Humvee mounting an M60 and a panel truck, both painted in European-style green camo.

Bustin' Bunkers

They were watching a Kuwaiti Centurion main battle tank shooting it out with a bunker located in the middle of the minefield. The Centurion found a lane through the minefield and took the bunker under fire with its heavy machine gun.

The tank was 300 meters from us and the bunker was another 200 meters farther out. The Iraqis were shooting back with some kind of automatic weapon, at which point we hit the dirt. A sergeant major dragged out two AT4s from the back of the Humvee and was getting ready to take out the Iraqis. The Kuwaiti tank had been firing short bursts, but now cut loose with one long burst — why he didn't use his main gun I don't know — and the bunker's occupants surrendered.

*Why he didn't
use his
main gun I don't
know.*

We went on ahead about 10 kilometers and came across eight Iraqi prisoners who had just popped up from the sand with a white flag. One had a crutch. All along the road were dozens of Iraqi vehicles that had been knocked out one way or another.

We caught up with a Syrian armored unit driving T-55s and T-62s. They were a good looking outfit and maintained good intervals, not sloppy at all. A few clicks further we encountered columns of Saudi vehicles all bunched up in a complete goose fuck. Hundreds of vehicles bumper to bumper, no combat spacing whatsoever. I mean a beautiful target.

They were running around laughing and screwing around and what have you. They were just parked like civilians on the fucking road for a mile and a half. Tankers interspersed with armored vehicles interspersed with Land-Rovers. Off to the right, on the other hand, was a well-dispersed Kuwaiti infantry battalion.

"That's our outfit. Can we go there?" one of my passengers asked.

I asked if he was sure there were no mines, to which he replied, "No, no, no mines." So I followed tracks up the hill.

The Kuwaitis were traveling in trucks. Each truck carried maybe 15 guys and their duffel bags. They were wearing German-made chemical suits and had these funny rubber booties that wrapped around their feet.

They had just butchered a sheep, and invited me to stay as an honored guest. They threw the meat in a pot and lit a gas stove under it. They then put curry powder, onions, water and rice in the pot. It cooked while we sat around BS-ing and drinking tea.

The American Special Forces guys that were with them came over and checked me out, to see who I was. I told them I was a contract employee going to Kuwait City. I don't know if they believed me but they gave me no grief. I killed about two hours before I suggested to my boys, "Let's go to Kuwait City."

"No, no, we're with our outfit now, we'll stay," came the reply. It was about 1400, so I asked, "Is the road open?"

"I think there's a lot of fucking fighting up there," one of the American SFers said. Then a young, rather arrogant, Kuwaiti lieutenant, a real Lawrence of Arabia type, said, "Oh no, Kuwaiti armor has cleared this road."

"Why aren't you going then?" I asked.

"We're waiting for orders," he replied.

So I jumped in my car and drove toward Kuwait City. The closer I got to Kuwait City, the fewer vehicles were on the road.

Into The Burbs

I reached the turnoff for the main road to Kuwait City on Wednesday the 27th. There was an M1 Abrams sitting right at that intersection off to one side on the high ground. I stopped and a lieutenant from the 2nd Armored Division came over.

"How are you doing, sir?" he asked

me. "What are you Psy Ops, Special Ops, something?"

"Yeah, something," I replied.

"You can't go any further north, sir, because there's fighting up there and that road is mined. We're sending everybody south onto the Fifth Ring Highway. You'll have to go through some of the 2nd Marines to get to that," he said.

"OK. Is it clear?" I asked.

"Well, there's sniping," he said. "Shit, I sent a couple of hundred guys that way already and they haven't come back, so it must be OK. Whatever you do, don't go off this road because there're mines on either side of it."

I drove off past several columns of recently knocked-out Iraqi tanks and APCs.

The Fifth Ring Highway is actually a sunken freeway, with embankments on both sides. I saw six, maybe eight, burned-out BMPs. Spray-painted on them was: "Iraqi tanks killed by USMC 2/28." I assume they were killed by tank fire or TOWs.

Who The Hell Are You?

When I finally arrived at a checkpoint manned by the 2nd Marines there were a lot of Kuwaiti civilians there beeping their horns and waving their flags. The Marines were deployed among the evergreen trees in what looked like a park to the right. I walked up there, went to the head of the line and said, "I have to get to Kuwait City." The familiar response was, "Well, who are you with?"

"I'm a contract employee. I'm supposed to meet my contact at the embassy," I said. "Where's your vehicle?" was the next question. I pointed out my civilian car. "Oh geez, I don't know about that," the Marine said. So he called the sergeant, and the sergeant called the lieutenant, and the lieutenant came over and looked at my passport. "Well, we can let you through, but you're going to have to go up this side road where it cuts through the Fifth Ring Highway. I can release you to a combat MP control point there. They'll know the situation from there on," the lieutenant said. This was fine by me.

I'd earlier spoken with some Kuwaiti resistance fighters, including an air force captain, who saw me getting through. The MP allowed them to go through as well and said we should all go together. They had a civilian car and a pickup truck and were armed with AKs and pistols. I soon found myself leading the whole fucking convoy. So I stopped and asked, "Why don't you guys go first?" There was a pause but finally the captain, who was driving a white Oldsmobile, said, "I will lead."

At the next checkpoint we encountered Marines, dug-in and armed with M60s; another 300-400 meters farther up there was an Army unit, also dug-in. I stopped and shot the shit with one of the Marines.

Up and to our right it was coming down like a jackhammer.

I tried to explain to the guy that I needed to pass through.

"Sir, we really can't let you in. You'll have to go with a military unit, because there is a lot of sniper fire," he said.

I was not getting very far and finally the Kuwaiti resistance guy, the air force captain said, "I want to see military intelligence, because I've got a list of Iraqis that must be arrested. Who can I talk to?" At this point somebody started shouting something I couldn't understand.

BMP Playground

I didn't pay much attention, as I was wandering around trying to be unobtrusive. I didn't want to get involved with military intelligence, because I didn't want to get caught claiming I was military intelligence. I went back to my car, got a canteen and wandered back, at which point a TOW was fired from the higher ground to my right.

It went "BOOM" and everybody just looked; they didn't hit the deck or anything. It zoomed across our right front diagonally and exploded. By this point I was crouching.

The Kuwaiti guys were standing up after the explosion; the Marines were all down behind the Jersey barriers looking

Deception and trickery were a journalist's best bets if he wanted to get to where the action was in the Gulf War. Here SOF Editor Robert K. Brown photographs friendly position from car window. Photo: Robert K. Brown

over and somebody was yelling, "Tracks! Tracks!" I didn't know what was going on. Then they pointed toward a secondary school with a playground, complete with swings, a jungle gym and slides. Three BMPs hidden in a maintenance shed began moving out. The previously fired TOW hit one BMP about 500 meters away and knocked it out.

The next thing I knew everybody was taking cover. Marines were firing their small arms to our left. Then there was a loud cracking noise and everybody went down behind the barriers. The barriers were under fire from the BMPs! Up and to our right it was coming down like a jackhammer.

The rounds were hitting and exploding on the barriers but not knocking them over. All I could think of was my rental car which was parked 10 feet from the barrier with a Jerry can full of gasoline in the trunk. I thought I better get out of here, but didn't want to move, because I could still hear the shit hitting. Then everybody started firing from our side. An MP, a really young troop, was screaming into the radio, "Shoot the fucking BMP."

The Marines attempted to fire another TOW but nothing happened as the missile hung-up in the launcher. A 25mm chain gun sounded off and penetrated one BMP's frontal armor. The struck BMP continued to move a short distance into the playground area before its Iraqi occupants abandoned it.

Soon all three BMPs were out of action. The Iraqi crew members not killed in the exchange fled but were later captured. I looked through the abandoned vehicles after it was declared safe and found a new AK-74, full canvas ammo pouches, bayonet and good condition Makarov pistol in one of them.

Afterwards I linked up with the Kuwaiti air force captain who took me on a rather circuitous route into downtown Kuwait City. I was finally where every reporter wanted to be during the liberation.

Mission accomplished. ✂



STUPID PRESS TRICKS

WAR has always brought out the best — and worst — in participants and groupies in the area in which it is fought. This phenomenon was alive and well in the Persian Gulf.

General Norman Schwarzkopf, a battalion commander in Vietnam during that politically controlled “two-step,” was faced with the Iraqis and Saddam Hussein on one hand, and the “ladies and gentlemen” of the press corps on the other.

In a remarkable display of patience, he set up a daily series of briefings for the international press corps at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A group of field and flag-rank officers from the various Coalition forces were detailed to answer questions from members of the Fourth Estate, both male and female (and several of as yet unknown gender).

Initially, the common thought running through the minds (?) of one section of the press was that they would be in a position to do to Gen. Schwarzkopf what they had done to Gen. Westmoreland and the U.S. troops in Vietnam: Conduct a determined campaign of their own by undermining every phase of the operation.

They had thoughts of flitting all over the AO, bumming rides on military land, sea and air transport, button-holing grunts, medics, commanders, you-name-it, and putting on the wire and tape every liberal-biased piece of bleeding-heart ca-ca they could come up with. Alas, that was not to be this time around.

Operational Security (OpSec) was the order of the day. But journalists would be allowed access to the front-line units, of course. They would be accompanied by a military escort officer at all times and would travel in a group. In addition, their dispatches would be censored for OpSec purposes. Fair enough? One would think so, but true to form, there came a howl from many of the correspondents.

Those who chose to pout from the safety of the Hyatt Regency initiated an attack of their own: The Penetrating Question. This

23 Questions That Should Never Have Been Asked

by Mike Williams

was designed to show the military briefer exactly how brilliant, intellectually superior and knowledgeable the individual correspondent-boob was. Obviously, in the mind of the questioner, a college degree in journalism and a hard-core liberal attitude was far superior to a mere colonel or brigadier general's military training.

SOF reporters at the briefings called this nightly ritual “The Boob Question of the Evening.” The best-of (or worst-of) that genre follows: (God's truth, these excerpts are real, and I have the tape to prove it!)

Boob: Are you softening up the Iraqis? And, if so, would that help the ground campaign?

Briefer: Next question.

Boob: The people of Britain are now in the front line of the war ... aren't they?

Briefer: Next question.

Boob: What unique capability does the battleship Missouri have that no other Coalition unit has?

Briefer: It floats.

Boob: Do the Iraqi army probes of your front lines indicate their desire to engage your troops in combat?

Briefer: Yes.

Boob: You've said the Coalition forces are on track; could Saddam Hussein be on

his own fatalistic track?

Briefer: Possibly.

Boob: Are there times when strategic targets are under attack when civilians are hurt?

Briefer: We try our best to avoid hurting civilians.

Boob: How do you up the option if Saddam uses chemical weapons?

Briefer: That will be decided at the time.

Boob: Are there any more Exocet-capable Iraqi aircraft left after all the aircraft flew to Iran?

Briefer: If all the aircraft have flown to Iran, then there appear to be no more aircraft.

Boob: Does the death of hundreds of thousands of people weigh heavily on your conscience and, if so, how do you handle it?

Briefer: Next question.

Boob: Follow-up to that question ... What's your reaction to the death of a POW in Baghdad?

Briefer: Deep regret.

Boob: How do you define a military target?

Briefer: One that has military value.

Boob: This may be a stupid question, but when will we know when the ground war starts?

Briefer: There will be a definite increase in activity by our side.

Boob: Ah, Group Captain (Royal Air Force briefer), the Iraqi Republican Guard know where they are ... Do you know where they are? Do B-52s know where they are? Do you know where the B-52s are as we speak?

Briefer: Yes. Next question.

Boob: General! General! In the action in the Gulf off Khafji, there were Iraqis in Zodiac rubber boats with machine guns firing at Khafji. What were those Iraqis in the Zodiac boats going to do?

Briefer: It was felt that they were going to fire on Khafji.

Boob: General! General! What will be



Reporters waiting for something to happen. With the military's new system of pooling journalists, few could get to where they wanted to be.



Reporters swarm on Saudi general who led forces in the battle for Khafji. Questions heard by author in the Persian Gulf ranged from the decent (on occasion) to the boobish (often).

the topic of your talk with Cheney and Powell when they arrive?

Briefer: Military topics.

Boob: General! Could you discuss the political ramifications of the land war?

Briefer: No. Next question.

Boob: If the Saudi army is expanded to hundreds of thousands, what impact would that have on Saudi society?

Briefer: A large impact.

Boob: Can Iraq come back into the international arena with Saddam at the head?

Briefer: Doubtful.

Boob: Does the massive loss of life cause you grief?

Briefer: Next question.



SOF Publisher/Editor Robert K. Brown asks a question during briefing for international press corps. Questions from SOF journalists were a little more intelligent than those asked by reporters who only recently learned the difference between an APC and an AWACS.

Boob: Colonel (Saudi army colonel), do you have any political problems about inflicting massive casualties on fellow Arabs and, if so, how many?

Briefer: I discuss only military aspects.

Boob: (Frantic waving of hands) General! General! Can you give us the bridge philosophy as regards the bridge targeting?

Briefer: I don't understand your question.

Boob: General! Harkening back to Vietnam, won't the Iraqi people think

you're losing their hearts and minds by being callous and bombing civilian targets?

Briefer: We don't bomb civilian targets.

Boob: Are you concerned with the weather and sandstorms in your planning?


Briefer: Yes.

Mike Williams was one of SOF's foreign correspondents covering the Persian Gulf War. ✕

OF MINES AND MEN

SOF Joins
U.S. Navy in
Sweeping
Death From
the Sea

by Dale B. Cooper



ASK any sailor what he fears most about going to sea, and the answer will be mines.

"All I heard was a huge explosion ... a big bang ... I was thrown out of my rack. All I could think about was home ... I got into my flash gear, grabbed my rubber ducky, and hoped for the best," a sailor aboard the USS *Tripoli* said after his ship struck a mine in the Persian Gulf.

Everyone knew Saddam Hussein had mines, but it wasn't until the amphibious assault ship USS *Tripoli* and guided missile cruiser USS *Princeton* hit two of them that it was discovered that the Iraqis had laid a large minefield across the main shipping channel in the Gulf.

The 18,000-ton *Tripoli*, serving as flagship for Coalition minesweeping forces, struck an underwater contact mine that blew a 16x20-foot hole in its bow, leaving it adrift in mine-infested waters for hours without power.

The *Princeton* was rocked by another explosion about 10 miles

away. Minesweepers and six Navy MH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter minesweepers (from the *Tripoli*) were pinpointing other mines with smoke markers when it happened.

The mine that disabled *Princeton*, jamming her steering gear and putting a gash in her superstructure, was believed to be an "influence mine," triggered by the cruiser's engine noise or magnetic field.

It is believed Iraq used Soviet-made influence mines called KMD-500s and KMD-1000s. Both types can be dropped from aircraft or surface vessels. Influence mines, which Iraq was known to possess but had never used before, rest on the bottom of the sea and are harder to detect than the more traditional contact mines, which can be moored on cables or allowed to drift with the current.

Death From Below

Military officials say the *Princeton*, an Aegis-class cruiser with a super-sophisticated computer-linked radar and weapons system,

was in waters 120 to 180 feet deep when the mine exploded beneath its hull. Some military sources say influence mines, which contain 660 to 840 pounds of high explosives, can cause extensive damage to surface vessels from depths of 300 feet.

The minefield discovered by *Tripoli* appeared to be laid in three rows, each about a mile wide. These were the more primitive contact type, anchored to the bottom by cables. Based on a 1908 Russian design, contact mines were widely used by both Iraq and Iran during their war. The more sophisticated influence mines, however, add a new wrinkle to mine warfare.

The ships that sailed the waters of the Persian Gulf during the Persian Gulf war posted mine watches and took the threat seriously, but it wasn't until *Tripoli* and *Princeton* were hit that the danger was forcefully driven home.

Being the "mine watch" is one of the loneliest jobs in the Navy, but it is also one of the most important.

Mark Calhoun, a young seaman aboard the USS *O'Brien* (DD 975) drew the assignment shortly after arriving in the Persian Gulf. Calhoun could be found sitting in a folding chair scanning the horizon for floating mines.

Riding the bow of a destroyer as it plows through heavy water is like riding a bucking horse for hours on end.

"It's a lonely watch," confessed the 21-year-old seaman from Indian Harbor, Florida, who must have golf ball-size hemorrhoids from bouncing up and down on the bow for eight hours a day. Many of the mines he was looking for were planted in the Gulf a few years

ago by Iraq during its war with Iran.

Drenched On A Destroyer

Calhoun and another crewman stood watch for an hour at a time. That's about all they could take, getting soaked with salt water and spray. Lashed to the rail beside Calhoun was a red and white cooler. Inside were a pair of night vision goggles, a flak jacket, a logbook, some water and a few snacks.

Although Calhoun took his task seriously, he said it was boring.

"Extremely boring. In fact, I can't think of anything more boring," he said, scanning the water ahead with a pair of binoculars.

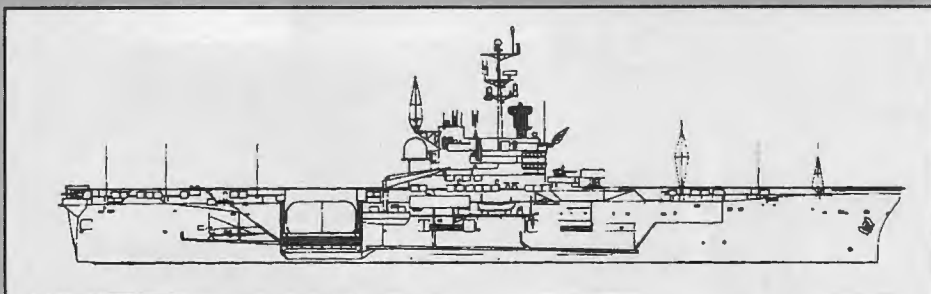
"The mine watch is critical, because he's the guy who can detect mines that are floating just beneath the surface of the water, those we can't see back on the bridge," the *O'Brien's* skipper, Commander Powell A. Fraser, Jr. said.

It was demonstrated time and time again that the mine watch saw things in the Gulf long before other lookouts could see them, and that early warning gave the helmsman time to maneuver. "I call it the best watch in the Navy, and as long as there are no mines, it's fun," Fraser said.

"I look for anything that floats," Calhoun said. Soon he was on the talker phone advising the bridge of a piece of wood floating in the water about 10 degrees off the port side of the bow.

Calhoun joined the Navy in 1987. His primary job is to maintain the forward missile launcher, but in the Persian Gulf, that became a secondary job. His main job is mine watch. As a lowly E-3, Calhoun figured he was a prime candidate for the unpopular duty. No one in the crew wanted to change places with him, but they appreciated his dedication.

"He's a big part of our defense and combat systems, and is a very intelligent young man, too, one who likes to engage in intellectual conversations on subjects such as the meaning of life," Electronics



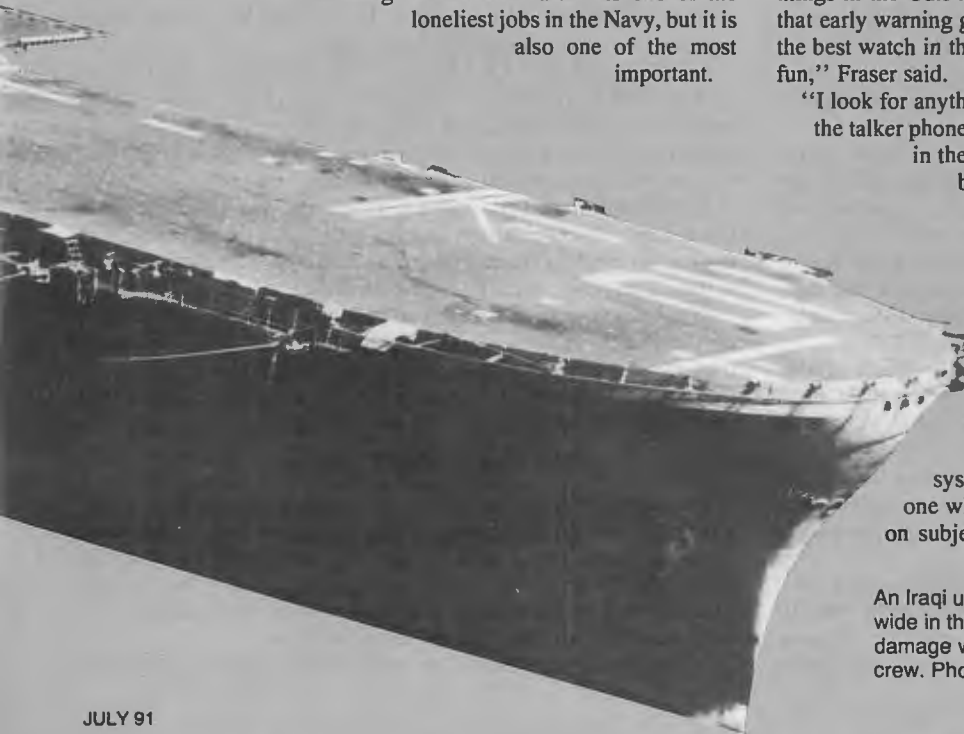
Two Jima-class amphibious assault ships (LPHs) were the first in the world designed specifically to operate helicopters. They can carry an entire Marine battalion landing team, its guns, vehicles, and equipment, plus a reinforced squadron of transport helicopters and various support personnel. The USS *Tripoli* was commissioned in August 1966, and cost about \$40 million to build.

Flight decks on the ship provide for simultaneous take off and landing of seven CH-46 Sea Knight or four CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters during normal operations. Hangar decks can accommodate 20 Sea Knights, 11 Sea Stallions, or various other combinations of helicopters. Four AV-8A Harriers are used in place of troop helicopters on many of the seven two Jima-class LPHs.

The *Tripoli* has four 3-inch guns in twin mounts, two 40mm saluting guns, two 20mm guns, and two Sea Sparrow missile launchers. Also, nearly all LPHs have been fitted with a Mk 36 Chaffroc launcher.

The ship's crew consists of 47 officers and 562 enlisted men (609 total); transport capacity is 144 officers, 1,602 enlisted men (1,746 total). Two Jima-class LPHs are fitted with extensive medical facilities including an operating room, a hospital ward, a pharmacy and laboratories.

Source: Jane's Fighting Ships



An Iraqi underwater contact mine blew a hole 16 x 20 feet wide in the bow of the USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10). Fortunately, damage was quickly brought under control by the ship's crew. Photo: U.S. Navy



CIC is the heart and soul of a fighting ship. During the Persian Gulf war, total concentration and enhanced vigilance were necessary to keep encounters with mines and other hazards at a minimum. Photo: SOF file

Technician David Jeffrey, one of Calhoun's closest friends, said.

In 1989 the missile frigate *Samuel Roberts* was almost blown in half when it struck a mine in the Persian Gulf. "Calhoun's job is to make sure that doesn't happen to us," David Johnson, a data systems technician from Chicago, said. "If he's having fun up there, he's not doing his job," he continued. "I don't want to be in my rack, which is below the waterline, and get blown out of bed in the middle of the night."

From Muskets to Missiles

The *O'Brien* was named for Captain Jeremiah O'Brien, whose men defeated the British warship *Margaretta* during the first battle of the American Revolution. O'Brien and his men, armed only with muskets, axes and pitchforks, boarded the *Margaretta* and fought to victory.

Since its namesake is Irish, crewmen aboard the *O'Brien* are the only American naval personnel allowed to wear green baseball caps — their ship's name emblazoned on them in gold. Crewmen from other warships can only wear the blue and gold caps.

The *O'Brien* was the 13th Spruance-class destroyer to be commissioned, but the ship is anything but unlucky. It had more intercepts of Iraqi-flagged vessels than any other U.S. warship during the Persian Gulf war.

Designed and built by Ingalls Shipbuilding Division of Litton Industries in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and commissioned on 3 December 1977, *O'Brien* displaces 8,000 tons and is 563 feet in length.

Powered by four GE gas turbines, *O'Brien* can slice through the water at more than 30 knots. Twin controllable, reversible-pitch propellers provide a degree of maneuverability unique among warships of her size.

The *O'Brien* is armed with two Mk 45 5-inch lightweight guns, two triple-barrel Mk 32 torpedo tubes, the LAMPS Mk III antisubmarine helicopter, NATO Sea Sparrow missiles, Harpoon antiship missiles, two Vulcan Phalanx close-in weapons systems

and the Mk 41 vertical launch system with Tomahawk land-attack and antiship cruise missiles.

The SQR-19 towed array sonar, SQS-53B bow-mounted sonar and LAMPS Mk III helicopter provide long-range targeting information to the ship's 24 officers, 24 chief petty officers and 300 enlisted personnel.

Blips And Buzzes In CIC

The heart and soul of any warship, whether it's a destroyer like the *O'Brien*, or an aircraft carrier like the *John F. Kennedy*, is the combat information center (CIC). It's in the CIC where ship captains like Cmdr. Fraser fight their ships.

"GMT 0943 Zulu ... Golf Bravo ... This is *O'Brien*," the officer in charge of CIC radioed. "I have unknown air, possible evaluation Iraqi, bearing 319, 34 nautical miles my unit, track 8217 ... Issued first challenge. No response. Issuing second challenge ... Preparing to cover with missiles and guns."

As the transmission ended, the *O'Brien* was already swinging its fire control system out and locking them onto the target. If the target is an inbound enemy fighter or bomber, a little buzz goes off in the officer's ear, notifying him he's sailing in "the danger zone."

When that occurs, the "action officer" in CIC advises an admiral of the target, as well as the verbal challenge that has been transmitted on an internationally accepted radio frequency. Up front, the 5-inch mount fires an illumination round, a star shell, which explodes in the air in front of the target.

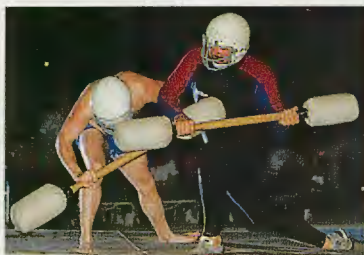
Cranking Up The Engine

Commander Fraser was closely monitoring the situation as he hunched over a table-top scope and watched the blip on the radar scope get closer. Things began to happen with blinding speed at this point. The 25-man crew in CIC was working like a finely-tuned Maserati engine. The electronic warfare suite on board picked up a radar beam, which identified the target as Iraqi.

"One illumination round. No response to warning," the action

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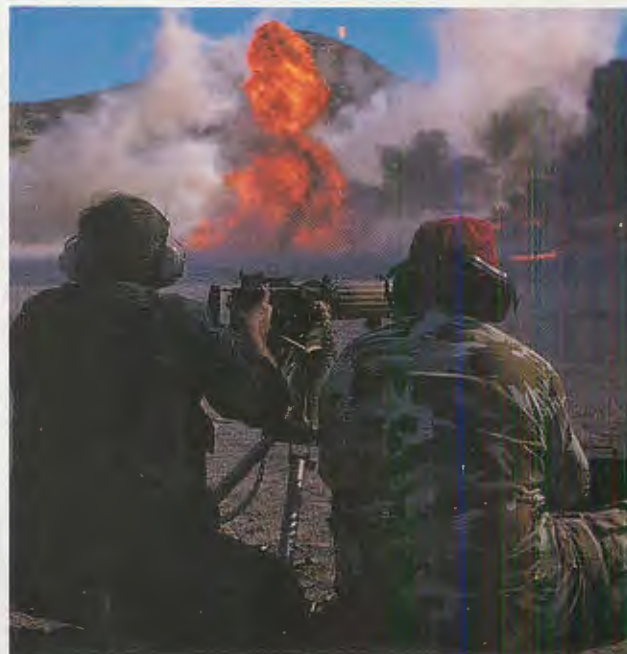
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officer said. "Golf Bravo ... This is O'Brien. My track is 8217, bearing 320, 15 nautical miles. No response to warning." When Cmdr. Fraser explained that the target was closing fast, the action officer broke in. "Guns and birds affirm, captain," he said.

That simply meant the O'Brien was loaded for bear, that guns and missiles were locked onto the target. "Need a contact call on the target ... Clean or dirty, bridge?" the action officer asked.

A few seconds later, the bridge reported that the track was "dirty," meaning the target aircraft was loaded with missiles. "Guns and batteries released," Fraser said. His gunners opened fire.

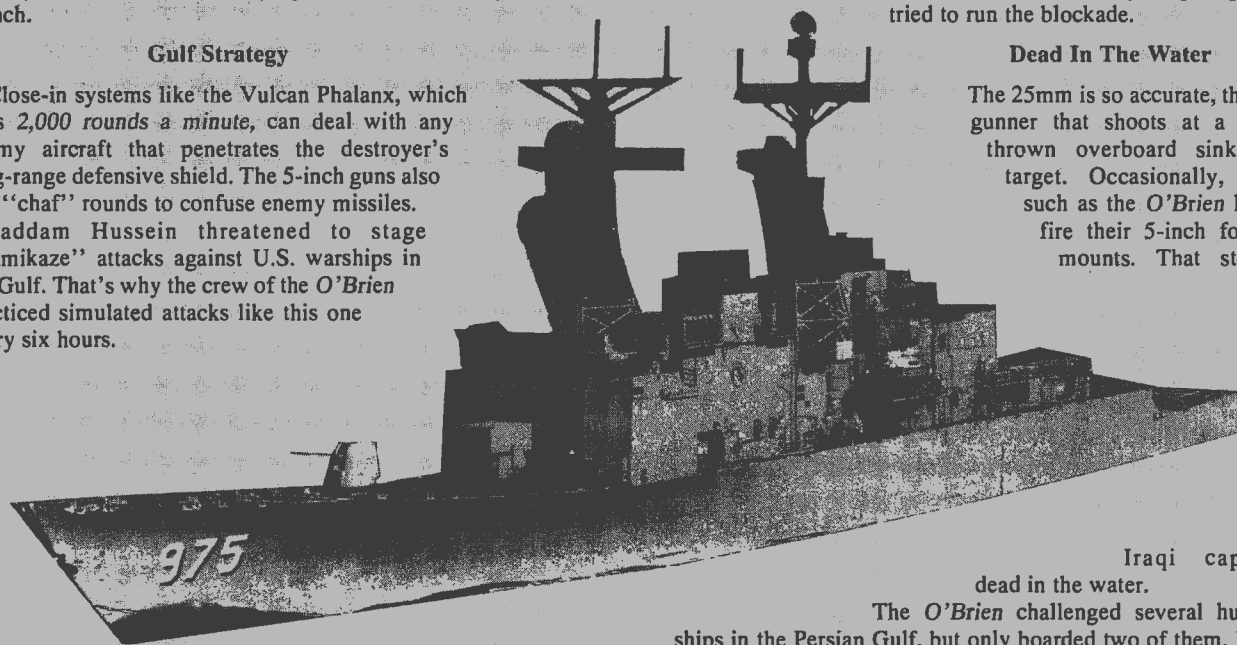
Normally, Fraser wouldn't wait this long, but today he wanted to put his crew through a full, simulated target scenario. If this had been an actual Iraqi fighter-bomber bent on launching an attack on the O'Brien, the destroyer would have reacted instantly.

The ship would have opened fire at about 9 nautical miles with NATO Sea Sparrow missiles and 5-inch radar-controlled guns that fire infrared rounds. The infrared rounds would explode in the vicinity of the aircraft, destroying any missiles it might launch.

Gulf Strategy

Close-in systems like the Vulcan Phalanx, which fires 2,000 rounds a minute, can deal with any enemy aircraft that penetrates the destroyer's long-range defensive shield. The 5-inch guns also fire "chaf" rounds to confuse enemy missiles.

Saddam Hussein threatened to stage "kamikaze" attacks against U.S. warships in the Gulf. That's why the crew of the O'Brien practiced simulated attacks like this one every six hours.



USS O'Brien (DD 975) intercepted more Iraqi-flagged vessels than any other Coalition ship during the Persian Gulf war — almost 1,000 vessels. Of these, however, only a few needed to be boarded. Photo: U.S. Navy

"My idea is to be able to shoot at the enemy before he can shoot at me," Fraser said as we left CIC and headed up a narrow passageway toward the bridge. "And if I can stay outside the range of his weapons systems and engage him with both the Tomahawk and Harpoon ship-to-ship missiles, then I win."

Unlike tank warfare, where the fellow who fires first usually wins, Cmdr. Fraser doesn't have to fire first. "I have a lot of defensive systems that can defeat enemy missiles," he said, "so I will not always be the guy who takes the first shot."

Fraser, who calls Alexandria, Virginia, his home, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, class of '72. He's been the skipper of the O'Brien for a year. A normal day will find him sitting in his chair on the starboard side of the bridge. It's up there where he supervises the stopping and boarding of ships bound for Iraq. But it's not a guessing game.

"We Know Who To Look For"

"We know who's coming and who's going, so we know who to look for," Fraser said. About then, Michael Williams, a young lieutenant from Farmville, North Carolina, got on the bridge-to-bridge radio, and contacted a suspicious ship on the horizon.

"Destination?" asked Williams. "Dubai," replied the captain.

"Dubai, in the [United Arab] Emirates." After checking the ship's call sign and cargo list against intelligence reports, the ship was allowed to continue down the Gulf.

Commander Fraser was directed to board Iraqi ships and search for illegal cargo by Commander, Middle East Forces, who determined which ships would be boarded and which would be allowed to pass through the U.S. Naval blockade. "Tension is not as high as you might imagine with regard to boardings," Fraser said, "because we practice them on a regular basis."

If a ship failed to heed a warning to halt, .50 caliber machine guns on the port or starboard side of the bridge would open fire. The "Ma Deuce" that Gunners Mate 3rd Class William Daniels of Philadelphia manned in "mount 32" on the port side could fire a steady stream of slugs more than 1,000 yards away.

"I'm ready to rock 'n roll anytime the captain calls," Daniels, who at the time hadn't had a chance to fire at any real targets, said. If a suspicious ship failed to halt, heavier hardware was used.

Amidships, there was a 25mm chain gun that fired 175 rounds a minute in front of any Iraqi ships that tried to run the blockade.

Dead In The Water

The 25mm is so accurate, the first gunner that shoots at a barrel thrown overboard sinks the target. Occasionally, ships such as the O'Brien had to fire their 5-inch forward mounts. That stopped

Iraqi captains dead in the water.

The O'Brien challenged several hundred ships in the Persian Gulf, but only boarded two of them. Fraser had to fire on the second ship when the Iraqis failed to alter their course.

"When we issued the initial challenge, the captain said he would be happy for us to board his vessel," Fraser said. The boarding team found a large number of plywood pallets on board, a violation of the embargo, and the captain was asked to reverse course and return home. His only other option was to go to a port selected by Commander, Middle East Forces. When the captain said he would return to Iraq, the O'Brien's boarding team left.

"But he never reversed course and began dumping the cargo overboard," Fraser said, who had shadowed the Iraqi merchant ship during the night. "When he refused to halt his southerly track the next morning, we fired across his bow. By the time we boarded the vessel, the crew had thrown most of the cargo overboard."

As head of the O'Brien's boarding team, which consisted of four Navy and four Coast Guard personnel, Chief Petty Officer Virgil Rabba was always worried about what kind of reception they would receive. "But the Iraqis seemed fairly cooperative," Rabba said as he discussed the boardings.

Rabba said he and his men tried to keep cool when they boarded an Iraqi vessel. "We didn't go aboard armed to the teeth," he said. The boarding party carried only .45s, and a routine search took about two hours to complete.

"We're not looking for hostilities when we board an Iraqi ship," Rabba said. This low-key approach, like just about everything else Coalition forces did in the Gulf, paid off.

Dale B. Cooper was one of SOF's reporters covering the Persian Gulf war. ✕

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STONER'S SUPER 63

Continued from page 69

is supposed to vary from 700 to 1,000 rpm depending upon the gas regulator setting, port pressure of the ammunition, ambient temperature, lubrication, degree of fouling and a few other variables. When set to the lowest setting, SOF's test specimen fired at about 715 rpm. The middle gas regulator position increased the rate of fire to approximately 830 rpm. When the maximum amount of gas was thrown into the system, the cyclic rate increased to only 865 rpm. Generally, the regulator should be left at the middle setting as this provides reliable performance at a reasonable rate of fire that will not induce excessive wear.

Most Stoner 63(A) barrels have six grooves with a right-hand twist of one turn in 12 inches to stabilize the 55-grain M193 ball projectile commonly used during this time frame. However, after NWM obtained the license to produce the Stoner 63A weapons, experiments were conducted with heavier bullets and some NWM-manufactured barrels will be encountered marked "200MM," which indicates a twist of one turn in 8 inches.

Ball, armor-piercing and tracer ammunition was manufactured for these tests by Industriewerke Karlsruhe (IWK), Germany — the post-1945 title of Deutsche Waffen und Munitionswerke (DWM). The ball ammunition is headstamped "NWM 67 5,56." The brass, Berdan-primed case has three flash holes. There is a lime green primer annulus and the propellant charge consists of 24.8 grains, nominal, of a spherical ball powder. The bullet weighs 77 grains, nominal, and has a flat base, lead core, slender ogive and cupro-nickel, clad steel jacket. There is a sharp crimping groove around the projectile and it is stake-crimped to the case mouth. Nothing is known about this bullet's wound ballistics potential, but it is an amazing precursor to the Belgian SS109 and U.S. M885 — predating these rounds by almost two decades.

During this same time frame, Cadillac Gage distributed ammunition with heavy bullets to the law enforcement agencies (principally in the Michigan area) who had purchased Stoner 63As, in one configuration or another. This ammunition appears to have come from two sources. Some is headstamped "IVI 69" (Industries Valcartier Incorporated, Quebec City, Canada — 1969) and features a 68-grain boat-tail bullet with lead core, copper alloy jacket and crimping cannellure. The Boxer-primed, brass case contains 26.5 grains, nominal, of a spherical ball powder. Federal also supplied small lots (headstamped "FC 66") with a similar bullet. Some of the Federal lots have "Colt" stamped on the box, apparently indicating use for the Colt

machine gun. Very little else is known about this ammunition.

Apertures & Ammo Boxes

Stoner 63(A) LMGs were initially equipped with a left-hand feed mechanism, followed later by a right-hand feed mechanism, which is almost the former's mirror image except for an additional stop pawl on the side of the feed tray. (Note: Early Stoner 63 bolt carriers will not operate the right-hand feed mechanism).

Rear sights are mounted on the top covers of the belt-fed LMGs. These folding-leaf, peep aperture (0.06 inches in diameter) sights are elevation-scale-graduated in 100-meter increments from 200 to 1,100 meters. Both windage and elevation can be adjusted in 1/4-mil increments. When the sight is folded down, a 200-meter battle-sight aperture with a diameter of 0.09 inches is exposed. Rifle and carbine rear sights — with large ventilated protective ears — are simple flip-type apertures with settings for 0-300 meters and 300-500 meters. They can be adjusted for windage or elevation in one-minute of angle increments.

Early ammunition boxes for the Stoner 63 held 150 linked rounds. Made of ribbed plastic, they have a tab that permits them to be attached to the side of the left-hand feed tray. The very first specimens were olive drab in color and indicate manufacture in Costa Mesa, California. They were followed by black boxes of the same capacity manufactured by Cadillac Gage in Warren, Michigan. Stoner 63A ammunition boxes were also manufactured in Warren of black plastic, but hold only 100 linked rounds as the gun was unbalanced when the larger box was attached. They can either be attached to the left-hand feed tray or held in a bottom box carrier when the right-hand feed mechanism is employed.

Several drum-type belt carriers were designed for the left-hand feed mechanism. Most common was a 150-round anodized aluminum container. The left-hand feed mechanism with this 150-round drum-type belt carrier attached predominated in use over the right-hand feed with bottom box carrier (the Stoner 63A was called the Mk 23 Mod 0 by the Navy when in this latter configuration) in Vietnam by a ratio of almost 10 to one. A 250-round drum-type belt carrier was developed at China Lake, California. Only a small quantity were manufactured as they were too heavy and bulky. RPD belt carriers were also sometimes jury-rigged to the Stoner by enterprising SEALs.

Stoner links are marked "S-63 BRW" and are scaled-down versions of the U.S. M13 push-through link for the M60 GPMG. M27 links, designed for the M249 SAW (FN Minimi), are similar, but will not perform with complete reliability in the Stoner 63(A) as their angle of pitch is slightly different.

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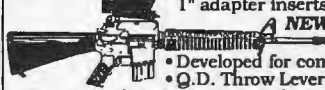
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Early Stoner 63(A) 30-round magazines featured steel bodies with black oxide steel followers and weigh 8 ounces. Later magazines of this type had chrome-plated steel followers. An aluminum-bodied magazine was developed that cut the weight to 4 ounces. There was also a 20-round magazine, but it is rarely encountered.

As they were mostly hip-shooting blasters, U.S. Navy SEALs rarely employed the Stoner bipod. Non-locking Stoner 63 bipods cannot be correctly attached to the Stoner 63A's gas tube as it is of larger wall diameter than the earlier model. Stoner 63A bipods can be locked in either the open or closed positions. Fabricated from stamped sheet-metal with numerous distinctive lightening holes, the Stoner 63A bipod can be adjusted in command height from 9 3/4 to 14 inches, albeit not easily. It does not pivot and the gun must be lifted to engage flanking targets.

The Well-Dressed Stoner

Stoner 63(A) accessories are as varied as the system itself. Either series produced or in prototype form only, in addition to those accouterments already mentioned, there was a blank firing attachment (BFA), winter trigger, asbestos-lined spare barrel bag, complete cleaning kit, 40mm grenade launcher, various types of slings and a bewildering array of magazine and belt box web pouches. SEALs frequently carried Stoner belts either in M14 magazine pouches or across the chest, "Pancho Villa" style, between two layers of T-shirts.

Three different bayonets can be attached to the Stoner 63(A). Most mundane is the standard U.S. M7 for the M16 series. In 1970, Eickhorn of Solingen, West Germany, together with NWM, developed a bayonet for the Stoner 63A system with wire-cutting capability. The clipped-point Bowie blade, complete with sawteeth fetish, uses the same wire-cutter concept employed on the ComBloc AKM bayonet. It can be identified by the figure of a squirrel over the NWM logo stamped on the blade, a ribbed, black plastic grip and a black plastic scabbard with a gray leather leg thong. Most esoteric of all is a Stoner 63A bayonet manufactured in very small quantity by SIG. It is of typically Swiss design with a black plastic scabbard and olive drab web front. Its highly polished blade will attract every sniper within a 1,000-meter radius and is endemic of a nation devoid of all battlefield experience since 1815.

Stoner Reborn

One final version of the Stoner system remains to be mentioned. In 1966 Great American Arms Co. Inc. (now known as Navy Arms, Inc.) in Ridgefield, New Jersey, advertised a semiautomatic-only version to be known as the Stoner 66. The retail price was \$199.50. While this was

just \$10 more than the semiauto-only Colt AR-15, the project was dropped after Cadillac Gage purportedly assembled no more than a handful.

SOF's test and evaluation of our Stoner 63A test specimen was entirely satisfactory. Several thousand rounds were fired using South Korean PMC M193-type ball ammunition (headstamped "80.05 5.56 PS"). There was one dead primer and one empty case spin-back into the receiver when using the 150-round drum-type belt carrier. There were no other stoppages. Group dispersion of tripod-mounted bursts were exceptionally small. Accuracy and hit probability were both high when the bipod was employed. When fired off-hand, accuracy was acceptable, if the bursts were held to two or three shots.

No more than approximately 3,600 Stoner 63(A)s were ever produced. Compare this to 50 million Kalashnikovs, 9 million M16s or even the only 7,500 German WWII FG42s manufactured and you start to have some perspective of the amazing mystique developed around a weapon system that never actually reached major series production. Stoner 63(A)s remained in SEAL inventory until about 1983. Thousands were torched by the U.S. government. With the exception of maybe two or three specimens, the few in collectors' hands in this country are restricted-transfer Class 3 dealers' samples, most manufactured by Cadillac Gage, exported to NWM in Holland and then imported back to the United States.

Better than M249?

Prior to the 19 May 1986 deadline, C. Reed Knight, Jr. — well-known for his sound suppressors and designer of the recently introduced and quite revolutionary Colt All American/Model 2000 pistol — formed, welded, finished and registered with the BATF, 100 Stoner 63A receivers from sheet-metal flats and fixtures obtained from Cadillac Gage. Manufactured to exact Stoner 63A specifications, all of these receivers are "non-restricted transfer" firearms, i.e., they can be legally registered to qualified individuals. Together with the new parts obtained from Cadillac Gage and NWM, they are available in any of the six Stoner 63A configurations. One of these units was used in SOF's test and evaluation of the Stoner 63A system. Every single component was in brand new, "in-the-box" condition when we received it. They are not inexpensive and a complete weapon will set you back up to five figures. For further information contact Knight's Armament Company (Dept. SOF, 7750 9th Street S.W., Vero Beach, FL 32968).

Clever is certainly an appropriate adjective for the Stoner 63A — in some areas perhaps too clever. While it successfully prevents an 11.9 pound belt-fed machine gun from hammering itself to death, the unique buffer system in the bolt

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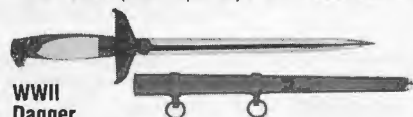
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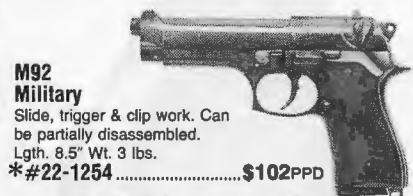
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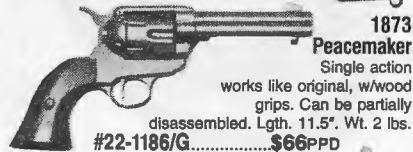
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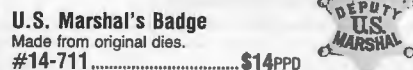
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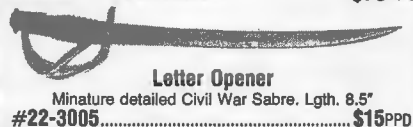


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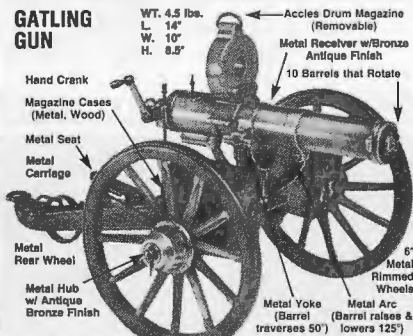
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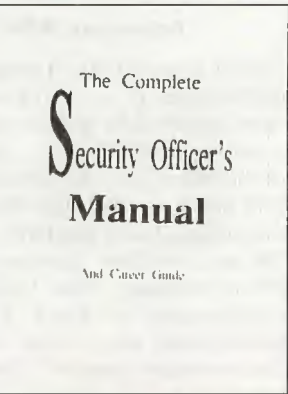
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SOLDIER OF FORTUNE MAGAZINE

carrier is not tamper-proof. And, while factory literature asserted that 81.3% of the interchangeable components were common to two or more configurations, the number of bits and pieces required to change from a rifle or carbine to a machine gun or to go from right-hand feed to left-hand feed would cause any supply sergeant to swoon. Furthermore, its complexity requires meticulous maintenance, probably more than the average grunt is capable of mastering.

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COMMANDOS

Continued from page 41

it on.

We heard shots from a second location, probably Israeli troops returning fire. Long burning lines of tracer spat out from a knoll in front, and received in its turn a flurry of tracer from its flank. Another knoll, just off to our right, erupted into fiery life, spewing yet more tracer. Again explosions: RPG rockets or grenades, it was hard to tell in the confusion. Then lots of shouting and screaming, followed by a rapid escalation in the firefight.

A dozen or more lines of tracer snapped right over us and ricocheted off the knoll behind us. To our horror someone on this knoll (thought by us to be unoccupied) returned fire. Who was behind us? It was

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painfully apparent that we were not only closer to the Israeli trenches than the assault team, but trapped in the no-man's-land between three separate hostile positions.

Tracer Fest

From somewhere unseen we heard the deep-throated roar of a .50 cal. Ma Deuce. More alarming was the sound of engines revving and tracked vehicles maneuvering. Tracer criss-crossed above us and cracked loudly. Other tracer went in all directions, including vertically into the sky.

The image intensifier night lens refused to function. Frantically, Yates unscrewed it to replace it with a normal lens, unsuitable for the task, but able to record something of the tracer and flaring light of explosions. Who was shooting at whom was a mystery, as several presumably Israeli-occupied knolls were engaging each other, as well as the points of fire which we thought might be a (by now) widely scattered PFLP section.

A fusillade of shots hit all around our position. We feared Israeli troops, equipped with night-sights, had spotted our furtive fumbling with the camera lens. We abandoned any further thought of filming in favor of continued survival.

Ricochets twanged and whined as they hit the boulders around us, kicking up showers of sparks and creating a deafening din. A spent round dropped next to Yates and scorched his hand when he accidentally touched it.

Our position was perilous and the odds of survival seemed minimal. Fear and misery enjoy nothing so much as company, and the three of us wormed closer together for mutual support. Yunus tightly gripped a Kalashnikov and I prayed he had no intention of using it, as that would draw more fire onto our already precarious position. I was surprised, and relieved, that no para-illumination flares had been put up by the Israelis.

Between A Rock, A Hard Place, And An Idiot

Shamelessly, I wondered if Yates' and Yunus' bodies screened me from some of the incoming. They were thinking along similar lines and each of us envied the other, under the illusion that they were less exposed. I exhaled deeply in an attempt to reduce my profile. At the same time, more for something to do than any real belief that they could protect me, I pushed rocks into a little mound in front of my head.

The shooting continued unabated, accompanied by irregular explosions (presumably more grenades) and lots of shouting. I expected, and dreaded, the arrival of mortar bombs. I find them more disturbing than small-arms or artillery fire. At least with those you can attempt to hide behind something and secure a degree of protection. Mortar bombs fall vertically out of the sky and find you out, even in the bowels of a slit trench, the luxury of which

I was sorely missing.

After 10 minutes, the firefight slackened. The residual shooting sounded like it came exclusively from the Israeli-occupied knolls which surrounded us. Then it too died away, until only irregular shots shattered the stillness. After all the noise, the silence was terrifying.

I imagined that Israeli troops were advancing on us and would be inclined to shoot first at any target they encountered. Yunus was in favor of instant retreat. Yates and I favored more caution, convinced that a premature and hasty departure whilst the Israeli positions were still vigilant was begging for trouble.

Lying still took a great deal of effort. Any movement disturbed the loose rocks on which we lay. I wondered if the PFLP section with whom we had climbed the mountain were now members of a new "dead patrol." I also wondered if we were yet to join them. Yunus became increasingly agitated and squirmed about, rattling the stones. Yates and I tried to calm him but he insisted that our position was "no good," a point we hardly needed to be reminded of.

Idiot Makes A Crawl For It

We heard more vehicles arriving and shutting down, together with voices calling out. This was enough for Yunus. He edged to one side of our depression, said he was going for the others and that we should wait for him here. With that, he rolled from between the boulders and began to quickly worm away on his stomach, making what we thought was enough noise to wake the dead.

Yates made a grab for his ankle to drag him back, but was too late. However, it did prompt Yunus to get onto his hands and knees — he accelerated away at a fast crawl, creating more noise. Convinced that shots would soon follow, we pressed close to the earth and watched him until he disappeared from sight in another fold in the earth 20 yards away.

Surprised that he had drawn no fire, we envied him his escape and wondered how deep the fold he had disappeared into really was. Our curiosity was answered when Yunus unexpectedly burst from the ground in full gallop at the same point he had disappeared and, plainly visible, scampered across the skyline and vanished over the ridge into the night. We were stunned that he had managed this unscathed.

After 10 minutes, it was obvious that Yunus would not be coming back — not that we wanted him clattering about next to us. Nor had we expected him to return, judging from the speed of his exit. Nonetheless, we cursed him for abandoning us. With dawn only a few hours away, we worried that nervous sentries would be trigger-happy when they finally spotted us. Running out of time and options, we had to move soon.

We lay flat on our backs with our

equipment on our chests and pushed ourselves along with our feet. Trying to move on elbows, knees and hands had proved too painful on the rock-strewn surface. Abandoned by our escort, we felt we were being punished for our folly in agreeing to film the mission and promised ourselves, should we survive, not to do it again. We advanced in short jerks, which is exactly what we felt like on that dangerously exposed ridge.

Dash Through The Dark

Painfully, we began to edge further from the shelter of the boulders. The choice was between speed and caution, making less noise but leaving us exposed for longer. We compromised and moved slowly but steadily. We kept low, moving with hands just above the ground, ready to reach out if we stumbled. The depression deepened, until we were able to stand erect and progress faster.

Coming round a bend, we were startled to see a figure sitting on a rock a few yards ahead. We sank to our knees in the shadows with little idea what to do next. Then the seated figure lifted a smoking cigarette, took a deep drag, and began to cough. It was Yunus.

We were pleased to find him but still annoyed that he had abandoned us. Closing up, we softly called his name, which caused him to leap up (without the Kalashnikov lying at his feet). He seemed genuinely pleased to see us and asked if we had seen the rest of the section as he had been unable to find them.

We wanted to push on, but Yunus was adamant that we should stay until the others turned up. As diplomatically as time and circumstances allowed, we pointed out that they may not turn up; would not necessarily return through that gully; or could already have passed by.

He admitted that there had been no set rendezvous, it being assumed that any groups on the mountain were bound to bump into each other. We reminded him that this also applied to any Israeli fighting patrols, which did nothing to deter him. He insisted that we remain.

The Ominous "Click-Clack"

Yates and I turned on our heels and set off without him. He immediately ran after us and denounced us for abandoning him. His complaints at our perfidious behavior were only silenced by a voice calling out. We threw ourselves down, landing heavily on the stones and trying to roll into the moon shadows at the side of the gully.

The voice called again. We urged Yunus to respond. He in turn thought one of us should do so. We pointed out that the voice had challenged us in Arabic. He now agreed to respond and, raising his head, called out in English, "OK, it is us."

There was the stomach-wrenching metallic click-clack of a round being chambered. Yates kicked Yunus in the sole of his boot and urged him to try again, in

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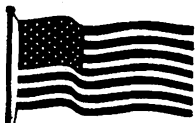
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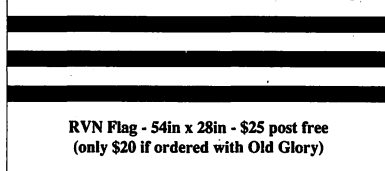
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Arabic. This time there immediately followed a murmured consultation, and then someone called Yunus by name, at which he leapt to his feet and bounded forward to meet several other men stepping out from cover. We had found the section and it was intact. Without further delay we continued down the gully.

It had been three-quarters of an hour since the attack. I now distinctly heard the first mortar bombs being fired and picked up my pace accordingly as I waited for them to come in. When they did, they exploded harmlessly several hundred meters away and posed no direct threat. Nevertheless, we all felt uneasy as long as we remained in range.

The section turned sharply out of the gully and began to climb back uphill. We toiled uphill for a while and I began to feel uncomfortable about walking directly toward the Israeli positions. I anticipated contact with an aggressive patrol attempting to cut off our escape. No one in the PFLP section had a compass; they navigated by guesswork and trial-and-error.

To my relief, we joined another gully and began to descend once again. After a good hour and a half of non-stop walking, the first hint of dawn crept into the eastern sky. Our pace slackened off considerably and settled into a steady amble. Everyone was fatigued and no one spoke.

Yunus walked with his hands firmly thrust into his pockets, eyes fixed on the ground. He had given his Kalashnikov to a younger member of the section to carry. When the sun rose above the far horizon, it soon warmed the chill morning air.

Eventually we reached a dirt road at the base of the mountain where the PFLP section flopped down by the roadside. The nightmare was over. We learned later that the image-intensifier night lens supplied by the network was known to be defective; they had merely "hoped it would work in the night."

Danger is nothing new for combat photojournalist Peter Douglas. A former Royal Marine, he has filed stories with SOF from war zones in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Liberia and other hot spots.

MARINES

Continued from page 29

relying less on individual replacements than unit replacements. Whenever possible, a German battalion, regiment, or division too depleted to fight effectively was withdrawn from the front and carefully rebuilt and retrained in the rear.

The Russians, who endured their own horrendous losses, also tended to favor unit replacements over individual replacements.

In fairness to the Marines, it should be

said that no one forecasted casualties in the Gulf War approaching the scale of World War II's meat grinder battles. Sending replacement companies to Saudi Arabia made sense to cover the few hundred, and certainly not more than a thousand or so, casualties the Marines presumably expected.

Better to send in a few individual replacements for a rifle squad, platoon, or company suffering say, only two or three percent casualties. But the prospect of higher casualties in a more lethal war than that in the Gulf should cause the Marines, and the Army, to ponder the virtues of unit replacement over individual fillers.

The hallmark of the U.S. Marine Corps has long been its adaptability — its talent for getting many different jobs done with whatever equipment (often not the best) at hand. And so it is today. Today's Marine Corps must be ready to fight in Norway and Turkey (NATO support roles), Korea or Thailand, the Caribbean, North Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, or again in the Persian Gulf.

The Marines must be ready for arctic, desert, or jungle warfare. They must prepare to fight anything from large conventional armies to Third World guerrillas and random terrorists. This diversity of roles, potential theaters, and possible enemies poses a huge problem for planners. The Marine Corps' limited budget and comparatively small size probably preclude fitting the force with ideal equipment and organization for any single scenario.

But, with the Middle East still a tinderbox and vital American interests at stake, no one can assume that Central Command won't have to fight in the desert again against well-equipped conventional forces during the 1990s. Before that happens, the Marine Corps and the Pentagon have some thinking to do.

Robert Caldwell, a Vietnam veteran, has covered counterinsurgency operations in Guatemala and the Philippines for SOF. He also writes frequently on national security issues.

CALL OF THE WILD

Continued from page 55

the USSR.

He would enter Chinese Turkestan through a pass called the Gez Defile. From the Kashgar Oasis, Polo circumvented the Takla Makan Desert. From there he traveled with Kublai Khan to Peking. "I had a permit to accurately retrace the route in China last October," Wheeler said, "but I don't want to have anything to do with the government that perpetrated Tiananmen Square." He will not return to China until that country's government has changed.

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Lewis and Clark: Independence To Astoria

"The adventure in the United States for me would be to accurately retrace the route of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's famous expedition in 1804-1805," Wheeler stated.

He would begin at Independence, Missouri, and go by boat or raft all the way up the Missouri River to Sioux City, through South and North Dakota, across Montana to Three Forks, then up the Jefferson River to the source of the Missouri. He would portage across the Bitterroot Mountains to the Clearwater River in Idaho, raft down it to the Snake River in Washington, and finally reach the mighty Columbia River, which would take him to Astoria and the Pacific Ocean.

"I can't think of anything that would make the incredible history of the American West come alive more than this expedition," he said. He estimates that the trip could be accomplished in two months, preferably July and August.

South Pole Sky Dive

Wheeler holds the record for the most northerly parachute jump, at 90 degrees north — the North Pole. It is one of the records in the *Guinness Book of World Records* that can never be surpassed. Although a team of U.S. Navy jumpers accomplished the same feat at the South Pole in 1958, Wheeler wants to be the first man to jump at both poles.

The North Pole is the center of the Arctic ocean and, therefore, at sea-level. The South Pole, by contrast, is at the center of a gigantic inverted bowl of ice that forms the continent of Antarctica. Since the South Pole is at an elevation of almost 10,000 feet, it would take an enormous parachute to make the jump.

Amazon-Orinoco: Mouth-To-Mouth

The two great river systems, observed Wheeler, share a feature that is geographically unique: they are connected. No other major river basins in the world have this distinction.

Thus, it is possible to begin at the mouth of one river and end up at the mouth of the other river. Wheeler envisions mounting an expedition that would "start in Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon River in Brazil, and follow it to its confluence with its largest tributary, the Rio Negro, and the city of Manaus.

"Then we'd take the Rio Negro up to where the borders of Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela meet. A little ways past the jungle hamlet of San Felipe, a small river meets the upper Rio Negro, coming in from the Venezuelan side. This is the Casiquiare, and it is perhaps the world's strangest river: It flows both ways." Wheeler would take the Casiquiare for some 200 miles to the tiny village of Piedra Lais, then onto the upper Orinoco.

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thousand or so miles will bring us to the Orinoco Delta and, once again, the Atlantic ocean. I'd want to take advantage of the opportunity this expedition would give us to spend time with several of the primitive tribes living in the most remote areas."

He estimates that the entire journey would take two to three months, and would be attempted sometime between August and October. The ideal transport, he believes, would be a hovercraft for most of the trip.

Landing On Everest

Ever since Reinhold Messner, the world's greatest mountaineer, climbed Everest alone without oxygen in three days (August 1980), the mountain "has lost some of its panache," Wheeler said. On the other hand, no one has ever attempted to land an aircraft on the 29,028-foot summit of Everest, and Wheeler wants to be the first to do so.

"Of course, it would be impossible with a fixed-wing airplane," Wheeler explained, "and the highest any helicopter can fly is about 21,000 feet." He hopes that technology will come to his rescue. "A new kind of aircraft called a 'volantor' is now being developed," he said, "which can hover and dart like a hummingbird; the 'volantor' just might be able to make it."

"After Everest," he said with excitement, "we could go after all the highest summits, including all 14 achttausenders (peaks more than 8,000 meters or 26,000 feet high)."

South Pacific Albatross

Wheeler said that he is a "confirmed nesophilic," using Michener's term for a "lover of islands." The trouble with visiting islands, however, is that few have regularly scheduled air service and it takes a great deal of time to sail between them.

To eliminate this problem, Wheeler wants a customized plane capable of flying to all of the world's most remote islands. "The PBV amphibian plane I would use to circumnavigate the Indian Ocean has the advantage of actually existing and is available for charter," Wheeler explained. But, he points out, it is small and relatively slow, with an air speed of only 120 mph.

"My real dream," he said, "is to have a large amphibian like a Grumman Albatross outfitted inside like a yacht, with a head, galley, bunks, and air compressors for scuba diving, so that you could fly to any island in the world and be totally self-contained. I can't think of a better way to see remote, untouched islands, and scuba dive in untouched dive spots, in a fraction of the time it would take to sail to them."

Where would he go first in his dream plane? "Well, there are 300 islands in Fiji alone," he mused, "not counting Astro-labe reef, legendary among scuba divers.

Continued on page 104

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Send your best work to: SOF Photo Contest, PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. Appropriately, winners will be chosen on 2 August 1991 — exactly one year after The Mother Of All Screw Ups began.

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#136 February 1989: **MERCS**: the Barry Sadler story; merc bar in Guatemala City; **AFRICA**: SOF in Chad; **HISTORY**: Brits face Afghan death march; **PHILIPPINES**: government victory on Panay; **WEAPONS**: guns of Ovamboland; Ruger Mini Thirty; Swedish Ks.

#137 March 1989: **AFGHANISTAN**: SOF debriefs four Afghan helicopter pilots; **SOUTH AMERICA**: SOF staffer wounded during Peruvian live fire; **WEAPONS**: Taurus .357 Magnums; today's surface-to-air missiles keep aircraft at bay; U.S. Army sniper rifle specs ill-conceived.

#138 April 1989: **MIDDLE EAST**: Golani Brigade's battle at Beaufort Castle; Beirut's forever war; **DRUG WAR**: SOF in Peru's cocaine valley; **AFGHANISTAN**: muj fighting to win the peace; **WEAPONS**: 10mm handguns; demented inventions; UZI caliber conversions.

#139 May 1989: **AFGHANISTAN**: SOF correspondent inside Kabul; interview with Abdul Haq, commander poised to take the city; **VIETNAM**: downed American flyer in Hanoi prison camp; **POW/MIA** video "We Can Keep You Forever" review; **WEAPONS**: M60 quick fixes.

#140 June 1989: **DRUG WAR**: Crack in America and L.A. gang warfare; **AFGHANISTAN**: muj defend Safed Koh mountain passes; **MILAN** beginning to appear in Afghanistan; **AFRICA**: Mike Hoare's Congo mercs' masterpiece; **WEAPONS**: Applegate-Fairbairn classic smatchet; H&K's P7K3 pistol.

#141 July 1989: **SOUTHEAST ASIA**: escape and evasion in Cambodia; **ELITE UNITS**: Colombia's Lancers; **STATESIDE**: crack and drug gangs invade the heartland; **AFGHANISTAN**: Congressman Wilson gets muj Stinger missiles; **WEAPONS**: new Detonics compact .45; facts on gun ownership.

#142 August 1989: **ELITE UNITS**: U.S. Marine snipers in Beirut; Oman's Cobra commandos; **AFGHANISTAN**: muj attack Jalalabad; **AFRICA**: Angola's ambush alley; **VIETNAM**: cav scouts prowl for POWs; **WEAPONS**: South Africa's 155mm artillery.

#143 September 1989: **VIETNAM TODAY**: Ho Chi Minh City's ARVN vets; **AFRICA**: combat tour to central Angola; insider's account of Rhodesian Fire Force's air component; **ELITE UNITS**: SAS ops in Northern Ireland; **MERC WORK**: CTU rescues American held overseas;

WEAPONS: H-S Precision's take-down sniper system.

#144 October 1989: **MIDDLE EAST**: Delta/SEAL hostage rescue plan betrayed; **AFGHANISTAN**: SOF correspondent treks to Panjshir Valley, interview commander Massoud; **SOUTHEAST ASIA**: American aids rescue after Cambodian massacre; **WEAPONS**: U.S. Army's next combat rifle; U.S.-made Hind helicopter clones.

#145 November 1989: **ELITE UNITS**: what it takes to wear the green beret; British commando gunners; **SWA/Namibia's** Koivoet counterinsurgency police; **AFRICA**: SOF staffer again rescues Westerners from

Mozambique; **WEAPONS**: Soviet LAW, RPG-22; North American Arms' pint-sized .22; finally a knife designed for U.S. airborne.

#146 December 1989: **VIETNAM**: MACV/SOG spike team fights for its life; NVA general's pistol causes controversy; **AFGHANISTAN**: muj fight each other before uniting against Reds; **MIDDLE EAST**: Lt. Col. Oliver North's fight against terrorism; **CENTRAL AMERICA**: El Salvador's dying insurgency; **WEAPONS**: Casull's .454 cannon.

#147 January 1990: **INSURGENCIES**: Mozambique, Guatemala, Sri Lanka; **ELITE UNITS**: SOF

#149 March 1990: **DRUG WAR**: Rangers in firefight with crack dealers; **BURMA**: SOF under fire with Karen rebels; **ELITE UNITS**: South Africa's Recces Part 2, Brit Pathfinders; **PERU**: at focal point of Sendero Luminoso insurgency; **WEAPONS**: Walther's THP with Warp 3 sound suppressor.

#150 April 1990: **PANAMA**: Noriega falls and SOF is there — exclusive first-person reports; **DRUG WAR**: patrolling with night narcs; **ANGOLA**: UNITA beats back Marxist FAPLA offensive; **AFGHANISTAN**: SOF's reporter escapes execution; **WEAPONS**: Italy's 9mm Spectre, SOF Three-Gun Match.

#151 May 1990: **EL SALVADOR**: inside Salvador's Tet, American church merc unmasked, exclusive on FMLN assassin's bullet; **PANAMA**: Combat photographer goes down in action, Spectre gunships hit Noriega's HQ, 82nd Airborne sniper; **WEAPONS**: Israeli night observation equipment.

#152 June 1990: **VIETNAM**: secret SEAL mission; **SOUTH AMERICA**: Brit mercs target Medellin drug cartel kingpins, Yank trains Peruvian security teams; **BEIRUT**: SOF with Christian Lebanese Forces; **PANAMA**: Marines get in on the action; **WEAPONS**: Glock's Model 21.

#153 July 1990: **EASTERN EUROPE**: what really happened in Romania; **COMBAT REPORT**: Cambodia resistance attacks regime fort; **VIETNAM**: shootout on Highway One; **AFGHANISTAN** — muj versus muj; **USA**: death of a bank robber; **WEAPONS**: SOF exposes ComBloc support of FMLN.

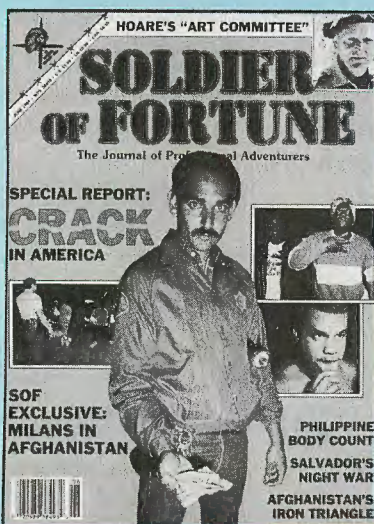
#154 August 1990: **SOUTHEAST ASIA**: Thailand's terror years, H'mong resistance in Laos; **VIETNAM**: POW nightmare, *Flight of the Intruder*; **WEAPONS**: Colt's Double Eagle .45.

#155 September 1990: **CENTRAL AMERICA**: heroes of Panama, FMLN offensive, SoFar trains Guat paras; **SOUTHEAST ASIA**: Communist defeat in Thailand, 'Nam doorgunner; **UNITED STATES**: Coast Guard fires up narcos.

#156 October 1990: **SPECIAL 150-PAGE SOF 15TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**. **CENTRAL AMERICA**: Just Cause jailbreak, SOF trains contras; **AFRICA**: Yank in Liberia; **MERCENARIES**: treachery in Suriname; **ADVENTURE**: BASE jumping, SWAT Olympics.

#157 November 1990: **SOUTH/CENTRAL AMERICA**: Bogota bomb squad, SOF trains Salvo SWAT, anti-Castro Cuban exiles; **TRINIDAD**: SOF on the ground during coup attempt; **KOREA**: on the DMZ, Mil-Speak tunnels under language barrier.

#158 December 1990: **SPECIAL MIDDLE EAST COVERAGE SECTION**: Desert Shield showdown, Brit escapes from Kuwait, spec ops, terrorists back Hussein, SOF's RKB in Gulf of Oman; **CANADA**: civil war; **COLOMBIA**: kid killers; **WEAPONS**: S&W's Model 640 Centennial; **MERCENARIES**: French Foreign Legion — last bastion of the international soldier; **SOUTHEAST ASIA**: fortress Taiwan.



correspondent trains with Soviet paras; **ANALYSIS**: Oliver North and bombing of Libya; **HISTORY**: Tillamook guerrillas; **WEAPONS**: French surplus military rifles.

#148 February 1990: **SOF BEHIND THE LINES**: Burma, Nicaragua, Afghanistan; **ELITE UNITS**: South Africa's Recce Commandos; **ANALYSIS**: China; **WEAPONS**: Israeli Timber Wolf, Philippine bolo.

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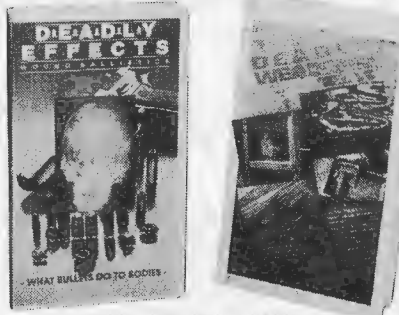
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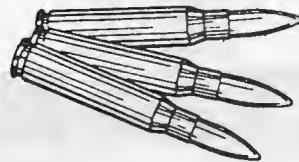
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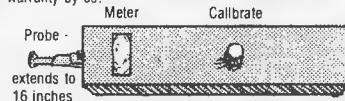
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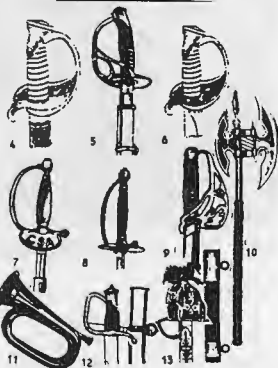
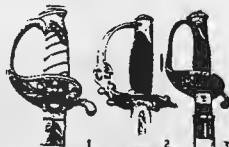
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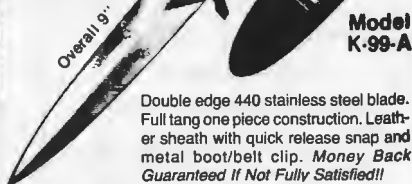


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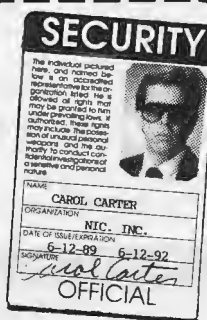
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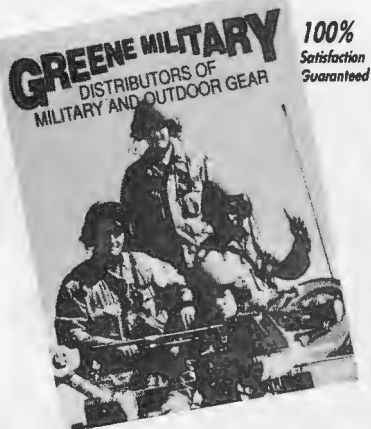
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naval base just after sunrise, headed for our extraction point, called the helicopter jockies, heated up some chow and sat back to wait for our pickup.

It was another day coming home empty-handed. But like a pig in a python, this, too, shall pass.

James L. Pate, a former associate editor at Soldier of Fortune, spent 18 days with Operation Snowcap personnel in Bolivia. This is the second of a two-part account of his trip.

SHARP EDGE

Continued from page 27

"It's broken in three places. We advised Probis about possible heat-treating problems, which they promised to correct. The second lot wasn't any better. The bottom line is that this thing isn't 'sailor-proof.'"

At this moment, all SEAL operators on both coasts are being issued the venerable Mk-3, a knife which breaks as easily as the C.U.K. but costs the Navy half as much to replace. Most SEALs, according to an operator with Team 5, carry private-purchase dive/utility knives when deployed on "real-deal" missions.

It will be several months before reports

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and stories of hand-to-hand encounters during Desert Storm can be collected and verified. I have already heard whispers of sentry removals involving knives, most of these coming from those SEALs assigned to off-shore deployment platforms operating in northern Persian Gulf waters. Reconnaissance teams from the Army were also active, as were Marine Force Recon elements, many of whom still favor the reliable Mk-2 "Kabar."

In short, combat knives played an important part in the everyday life of the American infantryman during one the most "state-of-the-art," high-tech wars in world history. The words of John Styers, a former Marine and pioneer of modern knife fighting techniques, still ring true.

"Your knife is constantly by your side," he said. "It gives you a great deal of confidence, but your real assurance comes from your confidence in your own ability to save your own life with that knife by carving out a heavenly military career for your enemy in whatever particular Valhalla he happens to believe exists."

I can't help but wonder how many of Hussein's uniformed thugs and looters became believers in the words of John Styers at the hands of America's best.

Greg Walker, a former U.S. Army Ranger and Green Beret, is currently executive editor of Fighting Knives magazine.

Continued from page 95

Then there are the Cooks, Kapingamarangi, Ontong Java. After the South Pacific, there are a lot of islands in other oceans. Then there's circum-navigating all seven continents and ... " His voice trailed off. "You get the picture."

If you're one of those people who thinks that driving in the rain in Washington is an adventure or that trying a new restaurant is "exploration," then adventure travel may not be for you.

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Neil Livingstone is an adjunct professor at several institutions, including Georgetown University. His areas of expertise include terrorism and security topics.

BOLIVIA

Continued from page 35

it more difficult to bring chemicals in from Argentina.

The sites under construction were pinpointed on a map for future visits by UMOPAR. We floated by the Santa Ana

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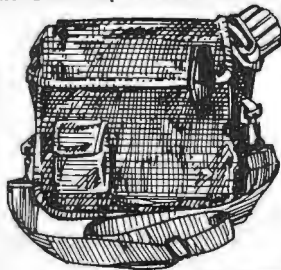
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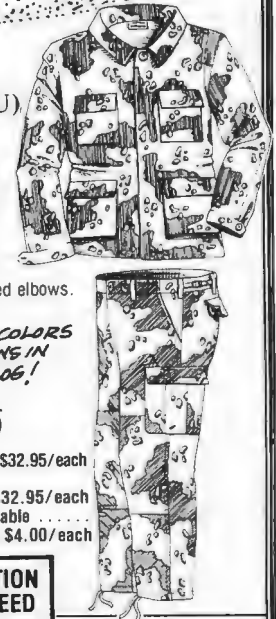
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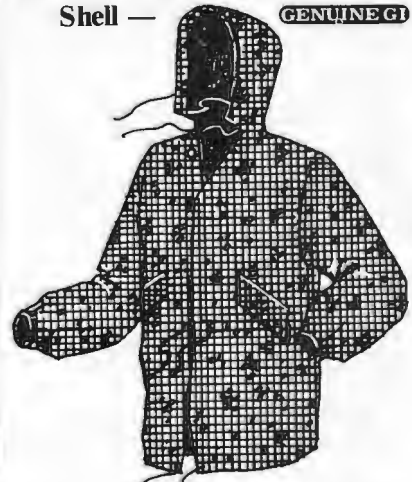
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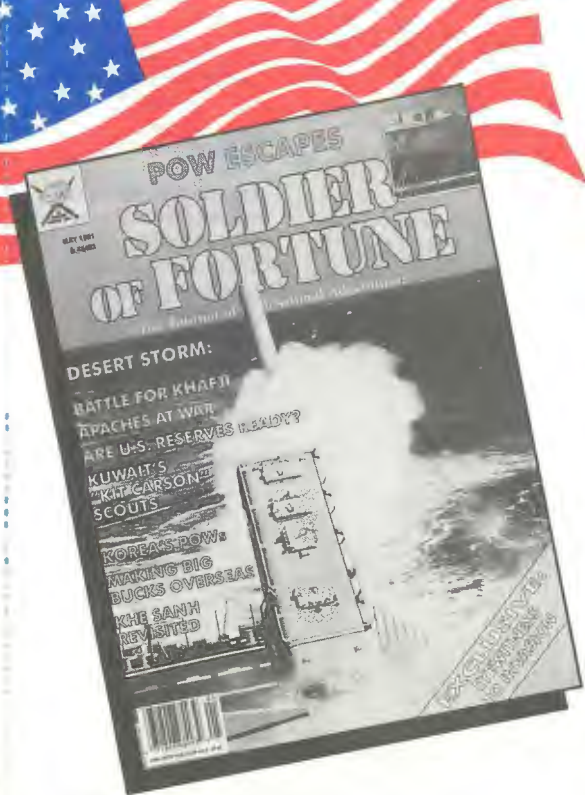
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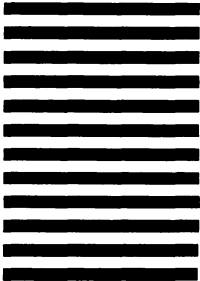




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